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A Renegotiation of the Role of the Artist in the 1950s Era of Mechanical Reproduction: The Early Careers of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg

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A RENEGOTIATION OF THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST IN THE 1950S ERA OF
MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION: THE EARLY CAREERS OF JASPER JOHNS AND
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

by

REBEKAH SCOGGINS

Under the Direction of Susan Richmond

ABSTRACT

Although Walter Benjamin argues printed materials are without traditional art authority or aura, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg's work exists in the tradition of high art despite their use of mass-produced materials. Johns and Rauschenberg rely on the distracted attention of the viewer in the age of reproduction to engender reassessment of materials in their works. They use objects that contribute to the new distracted audience but create works that force the viewer toward intense contemplation; their works also combat trends Benjamin identifies to stake their claim as artists of original works while remaining relevant to the modern era. Johns merges print, mechanized reproduction, painting, and sculpture to subvert and reaffirm his place as the artist of an auratic object. Rauschenberg employs ready-mades, painting, printed materials, and sculpture in hybrid art works that unite mechanization with human facture to renegotiate and expose the overstimulation of reproduced objects within society.

INDEX WORDS: Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Walter Benjamin, Mass Production, Reproduction, Materiality, Mechanical Reproduction, Post War Era, 1950s, 1960s, Lithographs, Newspaper, Found Object

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

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Georgia State University

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INTRODUCTION

Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg began their careers in the 1950s, a time in American society and the art world in which artists and art critics alike were reconfiguring the place and meaning of so-called “modernist” art. Johns and Rauschenberg’s work was a departure from Abstract Expressionism, the dominant modernist art movement at the time that relied on abstraction, the artists’ inherent and unconscious masculinity, and the autonomy of the artwork from of the everyday. In particular, the Abstract Expressionists, as well as many other artists of the time, attempted to continue the separation between high art and mass replication. Replication was a new technological advancement that became linked with everyday life due to the types of materials the process created. This feat of separation was not easily achieved because society relied so heavily on mechanization and mass reproduction. Through a comparative study of the works of Johns and Rauschenberg, I will explore the ways these artists renegotiated their roles as artist in the post-WWII era of art in America and their methods attempted to close the gap between high art and everyday material culture through a reliance on reproducible materials, objects, and mechanized processes.

Numerous scholars have analyzed the increasing popularity of mass production in art.¹ In his 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin addresses the increased reliance on mechanization by describing the loss of the art object’s “aura” and of its categorization as high art in the new era of reproduction. Although Benjamin makes some interesting assessments throughout his argument, his scholarship provides the basis for the evaluation that I argue against in my analysis of Johns and Rauschenberg’s early work.

¹ See Joshua Shannon, *The Disappearance of Objects: New York Art and the Rise of the Postmodern City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 59-64, 77-85; Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, eds. Michael W Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard Press, 2008).

Benjamin's distinction between art – mainly painting and sculpture – and printed, reproduced material – which he establishes through a discussion of film and photography – illustrates the common tendency of separation in art since mechanization became an avenue for production, and his argument still had relevance in the 1950s and 1960s. Benjamin discusses how manual reproduction is less removed than technical reproduction, such as photography, because an innumerable amount of copies can be made; the original work of art can also be taken from its intended location and placed into situations it would not have been allowed otherwise.

Benjamin's concept is not a new one, given that altarpieces and other art forms have long been placed into situations they do not belong, but the likelihood was even greater now that the work of art could be duplicated with ease. He refers to film, and by extension mechanical reproduction in general, as a medium that does not stir the imagination or engender the contemplation that was typical in traditional art. He asserts that this causes the authenticity of the original to decay, which in turn jeopardizes its historical testimony and affects its intended authority. Although he describes the loss of the aura, Benjamin argues that it is not necessarily negative, as he sees the possibility for mechanical reproduction to inspire new roles for art and its relationship to the everyday.

Benjamin argues that art lost the physical connection that it once had with the artist, its connection to its creator, in the age of mechanical reproduction due to its interpretation through multiple sources and media. Benjamin argues this is due to “the desire of present-day masses to ‘get closer’ to things, and their equally passionate concern for overcoming each thing’s uniqueness by assimilating it as a reproduction. Each day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at close range in an image... a reproduction.”² Benjamin comments on how the masses succumbed to the trend in reproduction that was spawned from society's need for distraction; this

² Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 23.

inevitably led to more reproductions. It was a cycle that led to “the distracted masses” who learned “the ability to master certain tasks in a state of distraction [which] first proves that their performance has become habitual”; this leads to the acceptance of the reproduction and the need for objects that produce distraction.³ The way in which the distracted person responded to art changed; this led to a need for more immediate art, art that an unfocused viewer could understand, absorb, and digest with the least amount of time and contemplation. Although Benjamin notes this as a new phenomenon, it is unlikely that he could have taken into account the vast majority of responses throughout history to art works. He is, however, responding to the increased immediacy he points out in the modern era. This need for immediacy led art to transform into a form that used the recognizable object. Benjamin argues that the Dadaists’ tendency to include “buttons or train tickets” on their canvases was “a ruthless annihilation of the aura in every object they produced, which they branded as a reproduction through the very means of its production”; this trend was continued by Johns and Rauschenberg during the Neo-Dada period. He stresses Dadaist work was “a vehement distraction” which provided instant gratification for the masses’ need for commotion; they presented art full of “uselessness” with meanings too rapid for serious contemplation.⁴ He states that reception has been turned into distraction but argues that this is the only way for art to work for the newly distracted public.

Benjamin asserts that the masses no longer contemplate art in the age of mechanical reproduction and argues that art lost much of its authority and aura, which is to say its uniqueness, with the rise of film, photography, and mechanical reproduction. He claims that the originality of a work is embedded in its tie with tradition, and he describes how the functions of works of art have changed from religious to visual. Although Benjamin’s claims have some

³ Ibid, 40.

⁴ Ibid, 39.

validity, his argument is ultimately reductive; he holds up ancient art forms as exemplifiers of a wondrous, superior culture that cared very little about replication and consumerism. What Benjamin fails to realize is that the modern era of consumerism and the distracted viewer is not so different from many other time periods in the past. The market was a major contributing factor in art of the Early Modern Period and painting and sculpting were viewed as trades in which the artist was to make a living. It is also hard to contemplate the reception of the viewer as compared to ancient times because the situation in which art was placed varied greatly from the museum. However, working within the claims Benjamin makes about the modern era, Johns and Rauschenberg's works negate many of the overarching claims he makes about the ultimate influence of mechanization on modern art and the viewer. Johns commented on this change in his own art when he said that he moved to more recognizable objects because it left him "room to work on other levels."⁵ In Johns's view, the art still related to the audience and was able to be received by the consumer culture, but once the work drew the viewer in and encouraged him or her to take the time actually to look and contemplate the piece, he had left some clues and hidden meanings for the attentive viewer to find. With this idea in mind, Johns and Rauschenberg investigate the shift in art and combat the loss of authority through the merging of traditional methods with the reproduced material; this investigation challenges the ways in which the legitimacy and stability of the role of the artist was under attack in the age of mechanical reproduction.

Benjamin claims that artists in the new era of mechanical reproduction create only non-auratic objects viewed by a distracted public. I argue that Johns and Rauschenberg use the materials that are ingrained within the distracted culture Benjamin describes to combat the trends

⁵ Quoted in Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 31.

he identifies; Johns and Rauschenberg assert their position as artists of original works that exist within Benjamin's contemplative past but remain current and relevant to the modern era and everyday society. Benjamin argues that everyday objects in works of art decrease the authority and tradition of art, and it is this supposition that I aim to undermine. Benjamin argues that mass production causes the loss of the aura and the authority of the object, which he connects to the tradition of high art. Although he does not view this as a negative occurrence, he argues that replicated materials and objects are without the traditional authority or aura. I argue that, despite their use of mass produced objects and materials, Johns and Rauschenberg's work exists within the concept of traditional art Benjamin describes with the same authority and, in effect, the same aura.

Johns and Rauschenberg rely on the new attention required from the distracted viewer in order to engender the reassessment of the materials and objects in their works. The distracted viewer, as described by Benjamin, is the new kind of viewer where "the artwork is seen as a means of entertainment."⁶ The "uselessness" of the new art works made it "impossible to take time for contemplation and evaluation."⁷ Benjamin blames the "the greatly increased mass of participants" for the "different kind of participation;" in short, he believes that "quantity has been transformed into quality."⁸ He also highlights film and technological reproduction as contributing factors to the increased lack of attention expected and given by the audience. He discusses the ways in which the new audience, distracted by "mass of participants," is no longer able to give the art work "concentration" and does not see art, as the art lover of the past has done, as "an object of devotion."⁹ The contemplative art viewer of the past "is absorbed by [the

⁶ Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 39.

⁷ Ibid, 39.

⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁹ Ibid, 39.

art piece]; he enters into the work,” but “the distracted masses absorb the work of art into themselves.”¹⁰ This argument relates directly back to Benjamin’s overall assessment of the masses’ need to “get closer” which, in essence, is why he argues they absorb art into themselves in a philosophical version of consumerism. Benjamin does not take into account that mass viewing of art objects is not a new phenomenon and that art lovers still exists.

Through his exhalation of the glorious past of intellectual, contemplative art audiences, Benjamin undermines the capabilities of both the artists and the audience to create and understand art in the modern world. He implies that there are only distracted viewers left in the world due both to the art and the modern mass participation in art viewing. Johns and Rauschenberg’s works undermine this analysis. Like their Dada predecessors that Benjamin critiques, Johns and Rauschenberg use the objects and materials that contributed to the new form of distracted contemplation but, unlike the Dadaists, they create works in such a way that forces the viewer back toward the more intense, time consuming tradition of contemplation. Instead of giving the viewer a work of art simply for visual entertainment or for enticement as Benjamin suggests, Johns and Rauschenberg present objects that require greater contemplation despite their use of mass produced objects and materials. Johns merges print, mechanized reproduction, painting, and sculpture in his art and used the juxtaposition to subvert and reaffirm his role as the artist of contemplative works of art. Rauschenberg employs readymade objects, painting, printed materials, and sculptural forms to make hybrid art works that unite mechanization with human facture in order to renegotiate and expose the overstimulation of reproduced objects within modern society.

The works of Johns and Rauschenberg were made in a particular environment within the art world and society. The shift in modern art technique and its relationship to society that

¹⁰ Ibid, 40.

occurred in the 1950s and 1960s has been described and analyzed by numerous scholars. Leo Steinberg notes a perceptual change in the orientation of the picture plane around the early 1960s, a shift that is exemplified in both Johns and Rauschenberg's work. The flatbed picture plane, as Steinberg dubs the new orientation, "makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards – any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed."¹¹ This move from illusionistic art toward representations of modern, cultural objects interconnects with Benjamin's assertions about the aura of the art piece. Unlike the transition in Impressionism, which brought modern life into the artwork in the late 1800s in France, the illusion to a distant place disappears with the flatbed picture plane; the new plane Steinberg describes brings modern life to the viewer in a more immediate capacity by breaking the illusion and thrusting common objects and themes into the contemporary time of the viewer. Steinberg notes that society moved toward seeing concepts that were "conceived as the image of an image."¹²

Steinberg's argument is very persuasive; although there are some inherent problems with the evaluation that each aspect of what he claims is new in modern art, his general assessment is sound. Unlike Benjamin's reductive argument, Steinberg attempts to make sense of the new orientation in art without belittling art, artists, and the audience. Society began to produce more mass-produced, readily available materials, which was therefore reflected in the art, and Johns and Rauschenberg drew the objects and materials for their artworks from the culture around them. Johns and Rauschenberg took objects that were already in existence and made new works

¹¹ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 84.

¹² Ibid, 91.

from them, which therefore made an original of an already created object. This dynamic will be further examined in subsequent chapters.

There are multiple methodological approaches with which scholars discuss Johns and Rauschenberg. Each scholar has a varied method with which he or she analyzes the art, and the disparate interpretations provide numerous avenues for comparison and further study. A number of them, especially Jonathan Katz, Kenneth E. Silver, and Jonathan Weinberg, rely heavily on biographical information as a mode for interpreting their works. Katz's numerous essays discuss Johns and Rauschenberg's personal romantic relationship in depth, analyze the way their art changed during their partnership, and examine how their art connects with each others by reading their pieces using queer codes.¹³ Silver's work highlights the differing ways that gay identity was presented during and after the 1950s with regards to Johns, Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol and reads the subject matter in their work in relation to their gay identity.¹⁴ Weinberg analyzes the anality in Johns's works like *Painted Bronze (Savarin)* (1960) and relates these works back to his sexuality.¹⁵ While these approaches are valid, I aim to focus less on a strict biographical reading of the works and materials relating back to their gay identity and will instead concentrate on the ways their works fit within the larger discussion of materiality and artistic identity in their contemporary art period. Helen Molesworth analyzes Rauschenberg's early works prior to and including *Bed* (1955) in regards to the discomfort and repulsion felt

¹³ Jonathan Katz, "Jasper Johns's *Alley Oop*: On Comic Strips and Camouflage," www.yale.edu/lesbiangay/Pages/Academic/JK_Oop.html; Katz, "Lovers and Divers: Interpictorial Dialog in the Work of Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg," www.yale.edu/lesbiangay/Pages/Academic/JK_Lvrs.html; Katz, "Passive Resistance: On the Success of Queer Artists in Cold War American Art," www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/KatzPages/KatzLimage.html; Katz, *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 188-207.

¹⁴ Kenneth Silver, "Modes of Disclosure: The Construction of the Gay Identity and The Rise of Pop Art," in *Hand Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955-62*. ed. Russell Ferguson, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1992), 179-202.

¹⁵ Jonathan Weinberg, "It's In the Can: Jasper Johns and the Anal Society," in *Homosexuality and Homosexuals in Art Volume IV*. eds. Wayne R. Dynes (New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), 160-176.

when viewing them based on his use of materials, investigates the shift of bodily presence that takes place when Rauschenberg incorporates visually and texturally heightened qualities in his early black paintings, and relates his use of newspaper and other visual elements to fecal matter with allusion to anality.¹⁶ Unlike Weinberg in relation to Johns, Molesworth removes the links between the anality of the works and Rauschenberg's sexuality and instead focuses on the visual allusions to it.

Numerous scholars focus on the repetition in Johns and Rauschenberg's work and the ways that they recreate themselves with each image. Jeffrey Weiss discusses the way Johns's work exudes human, embodied characteristics, how the various layers of his works help expose the facture of the work, and the importance of the viewer to the work in the process of embodiment. He also argues, in contrast to Benjamin, that Johns's intention is not the object-quality of the work and that his methods represent his insistence that his paintings and drawings can never "be more than itself."¹⁷ Carol Mancusi-Ungaro emphasizes the importance of the layers and materials within Johns's work and uses her conservation notes in order to explore how the meaning of the pieces and the materials used to create them are inextricably connected.¹⁸ Yve-Alain Bois asserts that Rauschenberg's cardboard series is a subtle visual depiction of the information overload experience in the changing environment of the 1970s and explains how it deviates from the cacophonous, obvious methods he employed in his Combines over a decade before.¹⁹ Other scholars such as Leo Steinberg and Robert Morris focus on Johns's subject matter. Steinberg breaks down eight common points that are, in his opinion, shared by all of

¹⁶ Helen Molesworth, "Before *Bed*," *October* 63 (Winter 1993): 70.

¹⁷ Jeffrey Weiss, "Painting Bitten by a Man," in *Jasper Johns: An Allegory of Painting, 1955-65* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 22; see 2-28.

¹⁸ Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, "A Sum of Corrections," in *Jasper Johns: An Allegory of Painting, 1955-65*, ed. Jeffrey Weiss (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 236-260.

¹⁹ Yve-Alain Bois, "Pause," in *Robert Rauschenberg: Cardboard and Related Pieces*, eds Yve-Alain Bois, Claire Elliott, and Josef Helfenstein (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 17-28.

Johns's early work, examines how Johns treats each of the subjects within his compositions, and explains how they are presented in a way that was unique to Johns; he also assesses the public's initial reaction to Johns's art and shows how this relates to his categories.²⁰ Robert Morris argues that Johns's use of signs and his manipulation of the same object across works and mediums created a proleptic message about the events since the 1950s and how his works act as beacons from the past and illustrate how the political and social climates of the two divergent eras are connected.²¹ Ellen H. Johnson supposes an entity outside of the artist tied to the art similar to the aura.²² Benjamin ascribes the aura and Johnson explains that "artistic creativity" is in crisis. Despite the numerous interpretations by scholars of Johns and Rauschenberg and their connection to one another, none have attempted to connect their work to the rise in mechanical reproduction, the changing definition of modern art, and the renegotiation of the role of the artist.

Although other scholars have discussed ideas similar to my main argument, most of their suppositions rely on the artists' biographies and the art works alone and do not consider the meaning behind the processes or materials used. Benjamin supposes a presence within the piece and although Johnson hints at my argument, she focuses on the creative nature of the piece instead of on the artist. Unlike these, and other, critics, I argue that art pieces have no self-aware intrinsic essence; the place of the creativity can never be within the piece itself. Benjamin and Johnson's arguments do focus on the art piece, an approach on which I will also rely, but the dependence on a pseudo-personified art piece is not my intention. It is the artists' approach to these works and their methods and materials of creation that is the focus on my investigation. Johns and Rauschenberg's materials confront Benjamin's idea of the habitual, distracted viewer.

²⁰ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*.

²¹ Robert Morris, "Jasper Johns: The First Decade," in *Jasper Johns: An Allegory of Painting, 1955-65*, ed. Jeffery Weiss (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 220-239.

²² Ellen H. Johnson, "The Image Duplicators – Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg, and Warhol," *The Critical Response to Andy Warhol*, ed. Alan R. Pratt (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1997), 15-23.

Benjamin claims that the new distracted audience is incapable of contemplation; I argue that Johns and Rauschenberg transform the habitual behavior and mass-produced materials against the viewer in order to mediate contemplation. They use the materials, the everyday found objects and newspapers that are part of the habitual activities of the viewer in order to subvert the audiences' relationship to those materials and force the viewer out of their state of distracted, habitual behavior towards art and mass produced objects. The tradition of art relies on specific forms and media within a work and newspaper and found objects also have their own inherent habitual connotation. Johns and Rauschenberg, however, for a link between the two, which, in effect, helped them to renegotiate their relationships within art history as the creator of objects still linked with the traditional past but also connected to the modern art world.

My response to Benjamin and assessment of Steinberg's arguments pushes them one step further. If I define the auratic art object as a piece that exists within Benjamin's tradition of art as an original artistic creation worthy of contemplation, then I argue that Johns and Rauschenberg create auratic objects. Despite Benjamin's claims about the modern art object's political use separated from tradition in the age of mechanical reproduction, Johns and Rauschenberg's art exists in the area between the political propagandistic functional art and the ritualistic, religious image. They challenged the concepts of traditional art, but unlike the strict stratification laid by Benjamin, they created art works within the mechanical tradition without infusing them with political messages to irritate the masses. Instead, Johns and Rauschenberg re-engendered the art audience to contemplate the mass reproduced materials of the new distracted society. Benjamin argues that the unique existence of an art object, the "here and now of the art work," eludes technology. Although he claims this in relation to reproductions of art works, his argument can be used to assess the mass produced materials and methods used by Johns and Rauschenberg.

Benjamin links the “here and now” of an art piece with relation to its previous placement, the artist, and its history within art. What differs for Johns and Rauschenberg’s work in the modern era is that the here and now is imbued within the art piece itself. The everyday artifacts that they use throughout their works give the works a unique existence because the here and now of the piece is part of the piece. There is no longer a need to be in a church like an altarpiece and the gallery space does not matter; the here and now, the time, placement, and meaning of the work, is included for contemplation. In essence, they infuse an immediate aura into the art piece. Johns and Rauschenberg use art pieces like this to renegotiate their role as the artist in relation to art.

What makes them stand apart from similar artists in the past, however, is the ways in which they used the objects. Pablo Picasso, for example, relied on the objects he added to his works to be those objects – newspaper remained newspaper, chair-caning remained symbolic of the chair – all of his objects stood in for the things he referenced. Marcel Duchamp’s objects were works of art in themselves with little to no manipulation; there was also no concept of the original given that museums could create numerous copies of his works. Johns and Rauschenberg, however, reinvented their objects into other things; the materials and objects were transformed. The newspapers are materials for their works, not the subjects; the found objects incorporated into their works remained part of the whole and were typically manipulated in some way, shape, or form to become part of the integrated art piece.

Johns and Rauschenberg rethought their relationship to their works inside the new landscape in order to exist within it. Johns and Rauschenberg use ready-mades, employ the method of lithography and silkscreen, and utilize self-replication to express mechanization. Since there was a rise in the prevalence of the mass produced image in everyday life through advertising, newspapers, and mass media, Johns and Rauschenberg renegotiated their necessary

presence in the age of new technology through various methods. It is through this use of everyday materials that Johns and Rauschenberg challenge the idea of “high art” and force audiences and critics alike to rethink their relation to these materials and the concept of art in general. It is within this framework that I examine three distinct areas of Johns and Rauschenberg’s early careers. First, Johns and Rauschenberg merge printed materials such as newspaper and cardboard boxes with encaustic and painting in works like *Flag* (1954-55) and *Nabisco Shredded Wheat (Cardboard)* (1971) in order to amalgamate reproduction with artistic facture. Second, Johns and Rauschenberg manipulate and reimage ready-made objects into works like *Watchman* (1964) and *First Landing Jump* (1961) that went one step beyond predecessors like Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* in that they simultaneously assert and undermine the concept of the everyday object. Third, Johns and Rauschenberg’s insistence on using the same subject matter and styles across numerous works like the *0-9* portfolio (1960-63) and *Factum I* (1957) and *Factum II* (1957) illustrate their interest in reproduction while remaining cognizant of the artistic creation of each work. Despite Rauschenberg’s claim that he and Johns had “two very different sensibilities,” I argue that through these common themes, Johns and Rauschenberg utilize similar materials and approaches to mechanization and artistic creation in order to renegotiate the role of the artist in the age of mechanical reproduction.²³

²³ Calvin Tomkins, *Off The Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of Our Time* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 11.

CHAPTER ONE: MATERIALS MAKE THE ART: THE REINVENTION OF PRINTED MATERIAL IN THE WORKS OF JASPER JOHNS AND ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

The 1950s was a time of political and artistic unrest in America and the art world when replication and reproduction were becoming an integral part of everyday life. Ad agencies were on the rise, and companies had begun investing enormous amounts of money in advertising and the development of new, disposable objects.²⁴ Ellen H. Johnson writes of Americans during this era: “never has the human being been such a captive of the printed image, constantly changing and endlessly repeated: in books, newspapers, and magazines, on the shifting world of the TV or movie screen... everywhere pictured products and pictured people beckoning, commanding, and assaulting.”²⁵ Print media was inextricably linked with everyday life. It is within this climate that Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg began their careers. They met in late 1953 and slowly became a romantic couple in the months that followed; by the summer of 1955, Rauschenberg moved his studio to Pearl Street in an old warehouse district where Johns worked and lived.²⁶ Living in New York City, the center of the art world, exposed Johns and Rauschenberg to the ever-changing landscape of artistic creation during this time.

Their Neo-Dada style, formulated during these early years, conflicted with many of the other art movements during the 1950s and 1960s and with assertions presented by noted scholars about the state of modern art. Abstract Expressionism relied on abstract designs and grandiose biographical meanings that tied the artist’s personality and livelihood directly to their pieces;

²⁴ Shannon, *Disappearance*, 59-64, 77-85.

²⁵ Johnson, “Image Duplicators,” 16. This statement gives too much credit to the modern period since the printed image and its prevalence was prominent as early as the Early Modern Period. It is, however, indicative of the rise in advertising, mass-replication, and media such as TV and film to the vast, widespread degree that it reached in this era. This is especially true given how large the western world is and its prominence in every part of it during this time.

²⁶ Mary Lynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 87, and Shannon, *Disappearance*, 115.

Minimalism relied on geometric forms and concepts to drive their industrially created objects; Conceptual Art placed more emphasis on the idea behind the work of art than on the artistic creation of the art object. In opposition to these concurrent movements, Johns and Rauschenberg made works that highlighted materials, artistic techniques, and modern life through representational subjects. The city around Johns and Rauschenberg was changing as much as the art world, and their immersion within this environment influenced the trajectory of their early careers.²⁷ The ephemeral nature of their environment and the instability in the art world manifested in the materials and techniques they used; they brought everyday life into their work through their use of elements associated with the new mechanical age in spite of their status as common and low objects. Critics such as Clement Greenberg and Walter Benjamin discuss the loss of high art and of the aura in the new modern age. Greenberg argues for the distinction between the avant-garde and kitsch, the latter a form of mass-produced art that resulted from the rise of the new consumer driven society that inhibit cultural literacy and instead foster a kind of easy art for the masses; Benjamin argues that the aura was lost in the modern age of the distracted viewer.²⁸ In this environment, where scholars argued that originality and uniqueness were fading, Johns and Rauschenberg rethought their aims and processes in order to create works that were modern and relevant to the everyday lives of the audience but that still relied on artistic creation. Johns and Rauschenberg merge printed materials such as newspaper and cardboard boxes with encaustic and painting in their works in order to amalgamate reproduction with artistic facture.

²⁷ Shannon, *Disappearance*, 66-72 and 108-128.

²⁸ Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing LTD, 2003), 539-546; Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 19-55.

Rauschenberg uses the materials and technique of the Black Paintings (1951-52) (Figure 1.1-1.2) to pay homage to replication simultaneously, to critique mechanization, and to exert his role as the artist of an original object. The Black Paintings are made of shredded newspaper strips saturated in glue; the excessive amount of paste gives the pieces a visceral, tactile quality. The build-up of adhesive and newspaper is covered with layers of black paint to create cracked, broken surfaces. Leo Steinberg notes that with the black paintings, Rauschenberg “used newsprint to prime his canvas – to activate the ground, as he put it – so that his first brush-stroke upon it took place in a gray map of words.”²⁹ The paint soaked into the newspaper that was littered with the mechanized print, the “gray map of words”; this merges the replicated materials with Rauschenberg’s facture. Although Rauschenberg uses replicated materials, he physically interacts with them in order to change their function and status as everyday trash and elevates the newspaper to art material. In the earliest Black Painting (Figure 1.1), Rauschenberg completely covers the newspaper with paint; although the words cannot be seen underneath, the material is still understood as newsprint. Rauschenberg changes his approach with his later Black Paintings (Figure 1.2); he paints stripes of black paint on areas of the surface but leaves sections of the newspaper visible. This change shifts the focus of the works. Not only is the piece made from printed materials, the materials become the central focus of the piece and, to a certain degree, the subject matter. Helen Molesworth describes newspapers as part of “an economy of endless repetition marked by daily consumption and disposability, perhaps best explained by the popular expression, ‘same shit, different day’.”³⁰ Through his use of this basic material, Rauschenberg elevates the replicated newsprint and changes the function of the material. He saves the newspaper from its fate as a disposable product and reassembles it, through his interaction and

²⁹ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 85.

³⁰ Molesworth, “Before *Bed*,” 70.

manipulation of the material, into an artistic product. His ability to promote the object relies on his role as the artist. If Rauschenberg did not label the collection of materials a piece of art and if he did not have a reputation as an artist, the work would differ little from the lesser materials with which it was created. This approach is similar to Duchamp, but since Rauschenberg manipulates the materials, Rauschenberg's work stands apart from his predecessors.

Rauschenberg plays with this tense relationship between trash and art in order to engage with the contemporary scholastic commentary about art and culture argued by Greenberg and Benjamin, especially the rise of disposability in modern society.

Rauschenberg's use of newspaper also alludes to the newly developed waste culture that was born from the spread of mechanization. Molesworth relates Rauschenberg's use of newspaper and other visual elements to human material excess and physical excrement. She asserts that through this use of the mundane, habitual activities and objects of "daily consumption and disposability," Rauschenberg insinuates the presence of the artist and the viewer in his work without physically representing a body. Although he was not the first to show artistic facture, Rauschenberg approaches materials in a unique manner in order to set himself apart contemporary artists as well as those who came before him. Lawrence Alloway describes Rauschenberg's Black Paintings as surfaces with a "fat, creased skin" due to the build up of materials; since skin is shed and becomes excretion, Rauschenberg's works relates back to the bodily excretion discussed by Molesworth through their method.³¹ She analyzes the discomfort and repulsion aroused by Rauschenberg's early works and the experimentation that contributed to this agitation.³² She asserts that the fascination that people have with excrement can be linked

³¹ Lawrence Alloway, *Robert Rauschenberg* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1977), 3.

³² Molesworth, "Before *Bed*," 71-2.

with the inherent need for self-knowledge.³³ The need for self knowledge can relate not just to the excremental nature of his facture, which Molesworth highlights, but also to the prominence of newspapers and advertising; humans are able to understand their own lives and bodies in greater depth once they are exposed to others, whether it be through newspaper or other objects. The juxtaposition of attraction and repulsion that Molesworth pinpoints in Rauschenberg's work illustrates the tension between the desire for self knowledge and the aversion to human excess.

Joshua Shannon describes the use of trash and replicated objects as an allusion to the development of a waste culture in 1950s America. Shannon discusses the rise in the production of thousands of objects in large quantities; the disposable product was more common, and the concept of exchanging one product for a newer model influenced people's purchasing habits. Shannon asserts that "consumption was often promoted as an obligation to country... [and] the disposability of products and ... new frequency of redesign... aimed to stimulate consumption by encouraging waste – old products would be thrown away and new ones purchased to replace them."³⁴ Rauschenberg transforms mass produced, disposable material – the material that was supposed to be waste – into something new. Viewers were confronted with the objects that had become nothing more than trash; through his use of these objects, Rauschenberg comments on the new waste culture, manipulates the meaning of trash, and asserts his role as the artist through his facture. Unlike Duchamp, Rauschenberg did not rely on the materials to represent his presence simply through their classification as art. He instead left visible clues of his manipulation through paint and glue that signals the audience to their manipulation. Because he uses materials and objects as well as painting and sculpture, Rauschenberg creates pieces that are unique and showcases new methods of artistic creation in the age of mechanical reproduction.

³³ Ibid, 76.

³⁴ Quotes from Shannon, *Disappearance*, 59, 61; for a larger discussion of the waste culture, see his discussion of the discourse of waste, 59-72, especially 59-62.

Rauschenberg worked very closely with Johns during the early years of their careers and produced works that are typically viewed as part of the same movement. Given this connection, a comparison of Rauschenberg's works to Johns can provide insightful details which might otherwise be overlooked. If read through a lens similar to that of Molesworth and Shannon, Johns's work includes hidden meanings and allusions similar to those found in the Black Paintings. In *Flag* (1954-55) (Figure 1.3), Johns employs similar materials and techniques to Rauschenberg, but Johns's use of encaustic and his designation of subject matter takes his work one step further. *Flag* is an encaustic painting of an American flag that consists of newspaper collage covered in pigment-tinted wax. The combination of encaustic, newspaper, and the American flag is a commentary on the materials and the subject matter, illustrates Johns's interest in replicated material, and reasserts his role as the artist. Encaustic, an ancient, time-intensive technique, is the antithesis of modernity and replication that Johns merges with newspaper, an ephemeral material that is replaced everyday. However, encaustic was a long abandoned method, which makes it as cast aside as the newspapers Johns uses. In this way, Johns a paradox between old and new, and he revives encaustic as much as his other discarded materials. On top of this dichotomy, Johns paints an American flag, one of the most mass produced objects in the country; unlike Rauschenberg, who simply uses materials and paint as allusions to the greater waste culture, Johns paints an emblem of the nation where the waste culture developed on the surface of the duplicated material. While the flag is not disposable, it is mass produced. *Flag* alludes to the "daily consumption and disposability" Molesworth discussed in relation to Rauschenberg, but Johns transforms Rauschenberg's simple monochromatic paintings into visceral, representational works that signify not only reproduced materials but replicated subject matter. Johns's encaustic work looks similar to the Black Paintings and the

build-up of wax has the same skin-like quality that Rauschenberg's pieces have and elevates the visceral nature of the work. The constant interaction between concepts creates a visual and intellectual dynamism within *Flag*.

The construction of *Flag* forces the viewers to scrutinize objects that are typically ignored and discarded. When examined closely, traces of the newspaper are evident underneath the paint and wax, especially the portions painted white and red (Figure 1.4). This creates tension within the piece because the printed newspapers were used to create a piece of art; *Flag* then reads as an original piece created from mechanized materials and subject matter, thus showing the push and pull between the role of the artist in relation to replication. The newspaper refers back to the system from which it originates; it makes an abstract reference to the general human presence from the pages and its acceptance of the printed form. Anne Wagner notes that within each piece of newsprint, "time and place seem both present and muted; each scrap has its own message, yet also stands in for its origin elsewhere, at another quite ordinary moment and site."³⁵ Each scrap provides a stand-in for the people and events that are described on the surface of the newsprint, which ties the audience and contemporary society to the work. The newspaper also alludes to the way in which it was produced in vast quantities and on disposable material. Fred Orton described Johns' tendency to leave sections of newspaper visible "not as a way of fixing extraneous materials to the surface... but as a way of constructing surface."³⁶ Johns creates the surface of the image specifically to call attention to its creation, and the construction of the pieces and the materials used become distinguishing elements of the work that focus more on the

³⁵ Anne Wagner, "According to What: With America at War and Midterm Elections at Hand, Art Historian Anne M. Wagner Reframes Jasper Johns's *Flag*, 1954-55," *Artforum* 45:3 (November 2006): 274.

³⁶ Fred Orton, *Figuring Johns* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 11.

craftsmanship that went into it instead of on the replicative origins of the materials used.³⁷

Wagner describes Johns's purposeful construction of *Flag* in accordance to his subject matter:

just as a fabric flag is stitched together from separate pieces, Johns likewise fabricated red and white stripes, the stars, and their blue canton each as separable elements – with this procedure too loyally insisting on the "flagness" or "flaglikeness" of what he meant his painting to be. The wax, newsprint, and bedsheet all say otherwise.³⁸

Although Wagner describes the way in which Johns creates the work like a flag, she also notes that the materials used break down that illusion. The way Johns makes the surface aides in the visual perception that *Flag* could be an actual American flag from far away, but Johns leaves just enough of his facture visible that the illusion is detected and eventually breaks down as the viewer gets closer to the image. Johns claims his use of flags stems from his interest in how the objects were “things which are seen and not looked at, not examined.”³⁹ The items he replicates, like many objects in the age of mass production, were seen frequently enough that they are no longer looked at or examined closely. Johns encourages active audience contemplation through his technique and materials. Through his attention to detail, Johns stays true to the original subject, elevates the replicated materials he uses, and reasserts his role as creator of a unique art object.

Despite the piece's connection to replicated objects, Johns points specifically to the methods used to create *Flag* in order to highlight the artistic facture and encourage audience interaction. The wax of the encaustic of *Flag* mostly covers the underlying material, which

³⁷ Johns was aware of the construction of his pieces and the implications their construction might have. Anne Wagner quotes a letter Johns wrote to William Rubin in 1977 in a footnote, “[Johns] responds to Rubin's request for a technical description of *Flag*... [and] explains why he wants the museum description of the work to be changed from ‘encaustic on newsprint on canvas’ to ‘encaustic and collage on canvas’: ‘It suggests to me that newsprint is attached to the canvas before the painting is begun, or that the canvas is attached to the newsprint after the painting is finished.’ Johns continued, ‘The actual process in making these works involved dipping pieces of paper and cloth into hot melted encaustic and fixing them to the surface before the encaustic had solidified. In this way, some areas may not include the use of the brush. The two ways of applying paint – with a brush or with the material dipped in the hot medium – have equal value and follow no particular sequence.’”; Wagner, “According to What,” note 4, 322.

³⁸ Wagner, “According to What,” 274.

³⁹ Walter Hopps, “An Interview with Jasper Johns,” *Artforum* 3 (March 1965): 34.

makes it hazy and almost unreadable. In order to see the slightly visible newspaper, the viewer has to look even closer at the piece in order to decipher the words. In a detail of *Flag* (Figure 1.4), the incomplete words of a headline are visible: “Prices O... Are M.” Although the complete article cannot be deciphered, Johns leaves just enough of a title unpainted to grab the attention of the viewer; he continues this tendency across the canvas. Wagner notes that there are “ten raised white letters that curve along the lower right arm of the bottom left star” that are “Large enough to read [and] they spell out ITED STATES” (Figure 1.5).⁴⁰ Johns imbues the canvas with a subtle reminder of the subject matter; similar to his construction of the canvas, this small visible word refers back to the source of that painting as being an American flag, the symbol of the United States.⁴¹ Through the inclusion of these small details, *Flag* forces the viewer to interact with the piece; in Johnson’s world of image overload, this dynamic is vital to the work. Although there is an element of distraction linked to the newspaper, Johns plays the small visual game that detracts from the distraction; he forces the viewer to decipher the words that are traditionally easy to understand on the newspaper and to hunt for small words like the painted “NITED STATES.”⁴² His manipulation of objects forces the audience to see, interact, and contemplate the items that they usually ignore or only take in at a glance without thought.

Similar to Johns’s technique in *Flag*, Rauschenberg leaves large areas of newspaper visible in his later *Black Painting*. Although originally untitled, the later *Black Painting* was given the subtitle *Asheville Citizen* when it was bought by the Museum of Modern Art because of the paper that the newspaper Rauschenberg used during its construction.⁴³ Rauschenberg’s

⁴⁰ Wagner, “According to What,” 276.

⁴¹ For a more in-depth analysis of the implications of Johns’s use of a flag as a symbol of national identity, see Wagner, “According to What,” 272-279.

⁴² Despite Wagner’s claims that just “INTED” is visible, I conclude through my own research, the N is also visible in the work; this can be seen in the detail I provide.

⁴³ Museum of Modern Art Wall Text for Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Asheville Citizen)*.

exposure of the underlying newspaper is easily decipherable, unlike that in *Flag* (Figure 1.6). An announcement for “Riley Smith’s All Night Singing Gospels and Spirituals, Asheville City Auditorium, Tonight at 8’Oclock” can be seen next to an advertisement that claims, “If you need to rent a car, rent a new car from Hertz Car Rental” on a small portion of the exposed newspaper page. Unlike the subtle references in *Flag*, *Asheville Citizen* confronts the viewer with a specific slice of life that gives “this painting historical as well as anecdotal context.”⁴⁴ The Black Paintings break down the illusion of production and force the viewer to interact with the subject matter and materials. Rauschenberg makes the audience reexamine objects that are typically discarded without assessment; the visual play between the overall form and the component parts creates the need for closer examination. In a society that Shannon described as obsessed with the continued upgrade, Rauschenberg presents the audience with a slice of their lives cemented in his work forever. *Asheville Citizen* embodies Wagner’s claims of newsprint that “stands in for its origin elsewhere, at another quite ordinary moment and site” almost more so than *Flag*; Rauschenberg leaves the exact details of a particularly mundane series of events solidified forever in a piece of art. Whether or not Riley Smith’s All Night Singing was an event to remember for the small town of Asheville, it will remain locked in time through its inclusion in Rauschenberg’s work. Johns and Rauschenberg both use the construction of their works to reiterate their role as the artist of unique pieces.

Many scholars assess the ways in which Johns uses his techniques to reveal artistic facture. Fred Orton’s discussion of the technique, context, and meaning of *Flag* illustrates how Johns reiterates his role as the artist throughout the piece. Orton describes in detail how Johns created this work and highlights the “light florid strokes... flicks and flecks, always from the

⁴⁴ Museum of Modern Art Wall Text for Robert Rauschenberg.

wrist and fingers... details of touch.”⁴⁵ Orton emphasizes the role of Johns’s body in the creation process, which brings attention to specific body parts that contributed. Orton implies that Johns literally touched his work; this description creates a bodily connection between the artist and the piece.⁴⁶ Leo Steinberg approaches Johns’s relationship to his pieces in a similar way, though he focuses on the absence felt in the finished work. Steinberg asserts Johns’s “early works seemed... to be ‘about human absence’.”⁴⁷ The “human absence” that Steinberg refers to is the former presence of Johns, a presence that is impossible to erase and very much present given the aforementioned modes of construction Johns employs to reveal his facture. Orton insinuates the artist similar to Steinberg but focuses instead on the marks left on Johns’s creation instead of his absence. Orton asserts that the surfaces of Johns’s works convey the “tactile sensation the painter actually experiences... with making such a mark” in a way that allows the surface gestures to become a “kind of handwriting [that] demonstrate[s] a personal touch.”⁴⁸ Orton equates the surface marks with handwriting, something that can only be accomplished by the artist’s interaction with the piece.

Johns uses his techniques and materials to reassert his artistic facture on *Flag*. Though Johns did not sign many of his early paintings, it is almost impossible to view one of Johns’s early pieces and not situate it within his oeuvre. It is through this “handwriting” that Johns literally inscribes his necessary presence onto the canvas, regardless of his original intentions.

⁴⁵ Orton, *Figuring Johns*, 118.

⁴⁶ Orton’s description is not a unique phenomenon because it links Johns’s practice to many other artists in the past. What makes it important in this era, however, is that, unlike the Abstract Expressionist, his brushstrokes were visible, and, unlike other artists who used replication like Andy Warhol, the mass produced materials were combined with the visible brush strokes.

⁴⁷ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 52. In response to Steinberg, Johns replied that this “would mean their failure for him; for it would imply that he had ‘been there’, whereas he wants his pictures to be objects alone.” Although this seems to contradict his role as the artist, Johns was reacting to the link between biography and his art, a link that Johns wanted to sever. I argue that he asserted himself, not with biographical connection, but with artistic connection through facture.

⁴⁸ Orton, *Figuring Johns*, 118.

Orton describes Johns's technique with the wax as "fluent and corpulent," which ties back to the bulky "skin-like" quality that Alloway saw in Rauschenberg's work. Orton asserts that the layers of *Flag* become obvious marks that were not just created by Johns; *Flag* was "of him," which makes Johns himself a key component in the composition.⁴⁹ He also claims that through his position, Johns becomes "an absent controlling presence, physical and mental, that best begins with *Flag*."⁵⁰ This idea is very reminiscent of Steinberg's analysis, but Orton believes that even though Johns is absent, his presence within the work is still felt through the touches and the remnants of his original inhabitation he left behind. Johns also claims that the meaning of the piece relies on its construction; when asked if he knew anything about a piece upon finishing it, he replied, "I know more than anybody else. I know how I made it."⁵¹ Johns links the physical construction of the work to the purpose of the piece; in this statement he unintentionally asserts his presence, and in a way his dominance, over the artwork. His role as the artist is sustained through the meaning of the piece because the meaning links back to its construction, which he performs. This can be seen in a specific example from *Flag*. Johns repaired some damage to the piece in 1955 and 1956, seen through the numerous newspaper scraps that date after its completion.⁵² The new additions add more stories and materials, which creates fluidity with regards to Johns's approach to his art. It also showcases that the "here and now" of the piece discussed in the Introduction is always present and can change through the manipulation of the artist.⁵³

⁴⁹ Orton, *Figuring Johns*, 120, 117: italics in original.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 118.

⁵¹ Jasper Johns quoted in Billy Kluver interview, in "I-7. Billy Kluver, interview conducted in March 1963 at Johns's studio, then at 128 Fulton Street, New York," in *Jasper Johns: Writings, Sketchbook Notes, Interviews*, ed. Kirk Varnedoe (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996), 88.

⁵² Museum of Modern Art Wall Text for Jasper Johns, *Flag*, acquired from Rachel Scoggins's photograph taken on November 17, 2007.

⁵³ The same would not be true if a conservator added to years later unless the newspaper used to repair the work was from the time in which it was created.

Johns plays with the expectations of the viewer to an even greater degree in order to reassert his role as the artist with *White Flag* (1955) (Figure 1.7). Johns again depicts the flag, but paints it white. The comparison of *White Flag* to *Flag*, which were completed in the same year, illustrates Johns's reiteration of mechanization; he paints a symbol that has been painted, sewn, and printed for hundreds of years in such a way that it is no longer about the object itself; it is about what it stands for, what it symbolizes.⁵⁴ It is not an actual American flag affixed to the canvas, but a representation by the artist's hand. He also changes the size and color of the flag, again a reiteration of his place as artist. Instead of the normal colors he used in *Flag*, *White Flag* depicts the object in divergent colors. Although *Flag*'s construction reveals the artist's facture, from far away, the piece could be mistaken for a traditional flag; *White Flag*, however, cannot be mistaken at any distance for a real American flag. The artistic facture is blatantly obvious, and Johns amplifies his presence by playing on the audience's complacency and expectations. Unlike the replicated objects that were products of an assembly line construction, Johns's pieces reiterate their status as art objects and his role as the artist.

The change in the American flag's design at the end of the 1950s also played into the audience's reaction to Johns's objects. In 1959 the flag was redesigned to accommodate a 49th star in honor of Alaska's statehood.⁵⁵ This seems an appropriate modification given America's need for redesign during this time period. The change in design made Johns's flags a product of their time. Not only were the flags obviously a product of artistic facture, his continuation of the same subject with the original 48 star configuration even after the redesign became a marker of his artistic presence within the pieces. Although the audience would expect the works to change

⁵⁴ This is true for a printed flag as well, but the difference is that it is not meant to be the actual American flag. For instance, there would be no possible patriotic condemnation expressed if the work of art was burned, just artistic censure.

⁵⁵ Shannon, *Disappearance*, 85.

with the redesign just like all the other products of the consumer culture, Johns remains loyal to his original composition, effectively capturing a particular moment in history instead of the continuous exchange of topics and objects to which audiences were accustomed. This relates back to Johns and Rauschenberg's use of newspaper, especially *Asheville Citizen*, which had the same effect; the newspaper they chose to put into the canvases became frozen in time and exemplary of the period in which they were created. It is then the objects, dates, and people within the works that the audience is left to contemplate as stand-ins for the larger material culture in which they lived. This is not the only example of how Johns reuses subjects, motifs, and techniques over several pieces, but it will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three.

Johns's *Target With Plaster Casts* (1955) (Figure 1.8) takes the meanings and intricacies of *Flag* and adds additional elements of construction in order to call attention to its creation and, by extension, the artist. The target portion of *Target With Plaster Casts* is constructed in the exact way as *Flag* and the same insinuations can be inferred in this portion of the canvas. However, the differences heighten the tension between replication and artistic facture. The canvas sits atop "a platform... while two other pieces of wood, nailed to the reverse edges of the stretcher, extend its depth another 3 inches."⁵⁶ Above the lower target portion, a series of 9 boxes "fashioned from a piece of found wood" contain painted plaster casts.⁵⁷ Much like the newspapers used to make the target, the wood affixed to the sides of the piece are also found objects. This illustrates Johns's continued utilization of replicated, found materials. The doors on *Target With Plaster Casts*, along with the extension from the wall, thrust the work into the viewers' space and require audience interaction. The doors are on functional hinges that open and close to reveal casts of various body parts and objects, and their functionality alludes to the

⁵⁶ Mancusi-Ungaro, "Sum of Corrections," 237.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 237.

possibility of the viewer's personal interaction with the piece. This element encourages the kind of close attention discussed above in relation to his other pieces. Like the collaged canvas portion of the work, the outer wood elements are covered by newspaper and pigment as well, although the wax was left out.

Much like *Flag*, the perception of *Target With Plaster Casts* changes when viewed up close. From far away, the target looks like any other generic target, but when the viewer approaches the work, the layers of construction become evident. Although it looks flat from afar, the three-inch wood supports extend the work from the wall. Johns did this intentionally because he was interested in this tension and claims he wanted to emphasize “that kind of physicality by bringing what is usually concealed behind the painting to the front of the painting.”⁵⁸ Johns wanted to bring the underlying techniques involved in the construction of the pieces to the forefront. When the edges are examined, lines of paint that dripped over the side when he painted the main target can be seen; the wood underneath is littered with holes and nicks that allude to their nature as found objects (Figure 1.9). Through these elements, Johns's “handwriting,” his “personal touch” on the surface of the canvas, is evident. Even the order of events can be ascertained from the work; since the paint drips over the side, Johns must have painted the surface of the target after he assembled them.⁵⁹ Johns simultaneously highlights the mass-produced objects, transforms their function, and reasserts his role as a creator of an original work.

Rauschenberg's *Nabisco Shredded Wheat (Cardboard)* (1971) (Figure 1.10) illustrates his evolution from collaged newspaper paintings to sculptural cardboard works and represents the various approaches he took to highlight replication and artistic production. *Nabisco Shredded*

⁵⁸ Johns quoted in Kluver, “I-7,” 88.

⁵⁹ For an even greater analysis of the construction of this piece and others, see Mancusi-Ugaro, “Sum of Corrections,” 237-259.

Wheat (Cardboard) is a sculpture Rauschenberg made out of found cardboard; much like his use of newspaper, Rauschenberg uses mass produced materials for his artistic practice. However, Rauschenberg's compositional approach in this work differs. Instead of relying on painting, Rauschenberg collects used pieces of cardboard and manipulates them into sculptures. He no longer relies on paint and glue to build up the surface of his object and instead manipulates the common form of the assembled cardboard box. On the left hand side, there are four boxes stacked atop one another by their flaps; the mass of the still-assembled box extends from the wall into the space of the viewer. There are four additional assembled boxes of various sizes on the right hand side that project out from the wall; the center of the composition consists of one Nabisco Shredded Wheat box flattened against the wall. Much like *Target With Plaster Casts*, portions of *Nabisco* come out into the room and demand attention. The flattened box at the center of the composition creates visual tension with the three-dimensional boxes that flank it. The flap of one box on the right side was left loose; like the boxes at the top of *Target With Plaster Casts*, this box alludes to an element of interaction between the viewer and the work. Although the boxes were not made by Rauschenberg, the elevation of the mass-produced cardboard box to art object relies on his role as the artist. He also collected and assembled the various boxes and made them into a dynamic composition.

Rauschenberg's manipulation of replicated materials in *Nabisco Shredded Wheat (Cardboard)* asserts his role as the artist. Many of the boxes used in this sculpture are of the same design. Three of the four boxes on the left hand side are identically designed; the first, third, and fourth box have the same red diamonds on the flaps flat against the wall. Despite their resemblance, Rauschenberg incorporated visual cues that simultaneously highlight their replication and expose their distinctions. The third and fourth box are oriented differently; the seal

and content summary are upright in the third and upside down in the forth. The first box is oriented the same way as the third box, but a plain brown box without writing on the bottom positioned between the two divides the apparent similarities. Although there is visual repetition, Rauschenberg manipulated the formal qualities in such a way that the elements become dynamic and visually exciting. When looking at the canvas, the viewers' eye travels across all the different elements of the work; Rauschenberg orients the boxes in a way that creates difference between the variant components. The center flattened box creates visual symmetry through the repetition of the Nabisco logo on each side of the box; since they are flat, the logos form a circle around the central cardboard section, which varies in both shape and design. Although these are replicated materials, Rauschenberg constructs the sculpture in such a way that the formal elements allude to his position as the artist and the visual dynamism is the product of his artistic creation. The boxes are oriented in a way that is not natural to their function; not only is it on a wall, the bottoms of the boxes can be seen. Similar to the way the perception of the *Flag* changes when Johns paints it white, the perception of the cardboard box changes. Since boxes are not meant to be seen from the bottom or hung on a wall, Rauschenberg plays with the expectations of the viewer in order to reveal his artistic exploitation of the materials. The manipulation of form asserts the facture that went into the object, but this is not to say that the object can only be read formally.

There is a larger allusion to waste culture revealed when *Nabisco Shredded Wheat (Cardboard)* is read beyond its formal qualities. Much like Rauschenberg's Black Paintings, *Nabisco Shredded Wheat (Cardboard)* is a commentary on the waste culture and the low status of common objects. The mass production of cardboard is similar to that of newspaper; it is the

“most common place material... [and] considered both ordinary and impermanent.”⁶⁰ In a way similar to that of newspaper, cardboard is used for a particular function and then discarded. The main difference between cardboard and newspaper is that newspaper is made to be read and then discarded. Cardboard, aside from the few blocks of text that describe the contents, is not meant to be examined at close range. It is made to be functional and nothing more; Rauschenberg’s implementation of the material in his sculptures removes the original function and elevates it to an art object. According to Josef Helfenstein, Rauschenberg “transform[s] this material, its low-ranking status and aura of ultimate artlessness, into something never before created.”⁶¹ Echoing some of Walter Benjamin’s terminology, Helfenstein interprets Rauschenberg’s use of cardboard as an alteration of form that creates an auratic object which, in turn, restores the Benjamin’s aura to the everyday materials.

Although the object is essentially trash, Rauschenberg’s manipulation of it elevates the simple material to an artwork, a feat that reasserts his place as the creator of the sculpture. The piece also alludes to Shannon’s description of waste culture. Hefenstein describes Rauschenberg’s use of cardboard in a way that links with Shannon’s overall argument. Hefenstein asserts that Rauschenberg employs boxes “because it incorporates life and culture in the most basic sense.”⁶² Since these objects are found pieces of cardboard, they are literal representations of the waste byproducts of culture. The boxes in the piece are inscribed with names of brands; the center box is for Nabisco Shredded Wheat and two boxes on the right side advertise Lew’s Air Pumps. Instead of generic objects like flags, Rauschenberg inscribes literal products into his piece that would have been recognizable as part of culture by the audience.

⁶⁰ Josef Helfenstein, “Introduction,” in *Robert Rauschenberg: Cardboard and Related Pieces* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 11.

⁶¹ Helfenstein, “Introduction,” 12.

⁶² *Ibid*, 12.

From afar, the names are formal aspects of the work much like the newspaper was in his Black Paintings; when examined up close, they become throw away names and boxes that exist within the mass arena of consumer culture. The inclusion of brand names also ties this work to Greenberg's assertions about kitsch and consumer culture, but through his artistic manipulation, Rauschenberg elevates his work beyond kitsch to art object. Rauschenberg created this piece and others in response to the way he was "bombarded with TV sets and magazines, by the refuse, by the excess of the world."⁶³ The information overload he experienced led to the elevation of mundane objects that were "seen and not looked at, not examined" in order to force the waste culture into a position where it can be reconsidered as art.

Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg merge print, mechanized reproduction, painting, and sculpture in their art and use the juxtaposition to simultaneously subvert and reaffirm their role as the artist and evaluate the consumer culture from which they draw their materials. The commentary on waste culture, mass-production, and modern art that Johns and Rauschenberg project within these pieces recognizes Benjamin's distinctions about the loss of the art object but offers ways in which the modern artist can combat those tendencies and reassert themselves in the role of the creator of an auratic object despite the use of replicated materials. Through their works, Johns and Rauschenberg stress their artistic role with manipulations and facture; in effect, they bring art and life closer together through the medium of mass production. Given that the art world argued for a separation of mass culture and modern life, Johns and Rauschenberg not only reassert their role as the artist, they pave the way for the combination of art and modern life in direct confrontation with modern scholars. They also reinvest uniqueness into everyday materials through their artistic facture, which demonstrates how mass production is not entirely anathema to artistic originality. Johns relies on painted representations of replicated objects as the platform

⁶³ Quoted in Robert Hughes, *The Shock of New York* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 345.

for his exploration of these themes while Rauschenberg's approach remains more cerebral because he relies on the concepts and literal objects of the waste culture to represent his commentary. The physicality and techniques of construction of the works are most important to Johns while Rauschenberg focuses on the message behind the materials and their formal composition. Johns and Rauschenberg continue their interest in replicated materials and artistic facture through their creation of casts, combines, and sculptures.



Figure 1.1: Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled Black Painting*, 1951-2. Oil and newsprint on canvas, 87 x 171 inches, Estate of Robert Rauschenberg.



Figure 1.2: Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled Black Painting (Ashville Citizen)*, 1951-2. Oil and newsprint on canvas, 72 x 28 ½ inches (188 x 72.4 cm). Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 1.3: Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1954-55. Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, 42 ¼ x 60 5/8 inches. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 1.4: Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1954-55. Detail.



Figure 1.5: Jasper Johns, *Flag*, 1954-55. Detail.

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Figure 1.6: Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled* (Asheville Citizen), 1951-52. Detail.



Figure 1.7: Jasper Johns, *White Flag*, 1955. Encaustic, oil, newsprint, and charcoal on canvas, 78 $\frac{5}{16}$ x 120 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Figure 1.8: Jasper Johns, *Target with Plaster Casts*, 1955. Encaustic and collage on canvas with objects, 51 x 44 x 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Leo Castelli Gallery, New York.



Figure 1.9: Jasper Johns, *Target With Plaster Casts*, 1955. Detail.

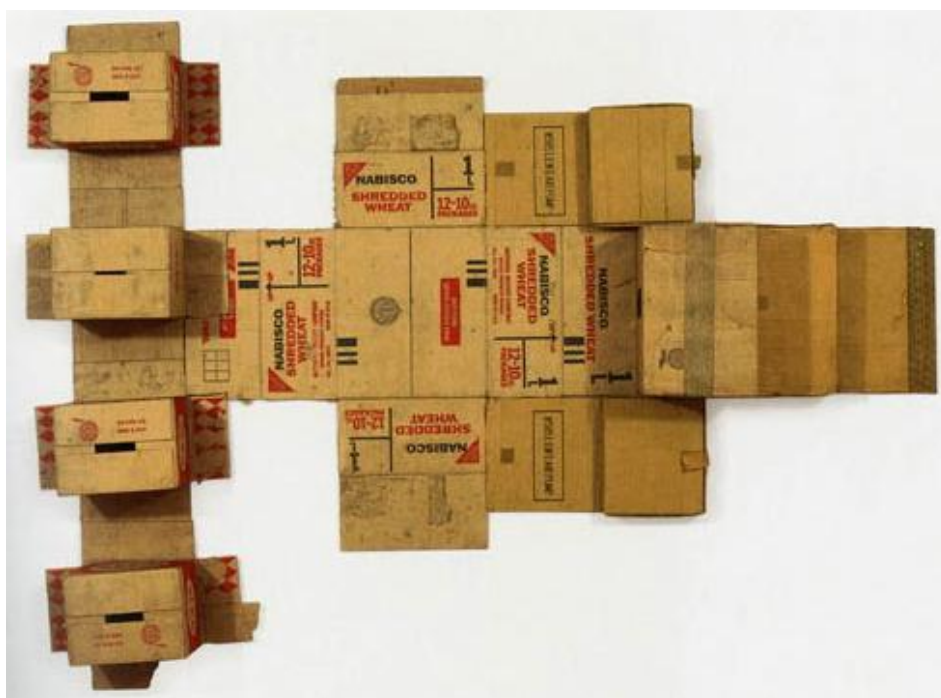


Figure 1.10: Robert Rauschenberg, *Nabisco Shredded Wheat (Cardboard)*, 1971. Cardboard, 70 x 95 x 11 inches. Estate of Robert Rauschenberg.

CHAPTER TWO: SHIFTING ORIENTATIONS: THE USE OF FOUND OBJECTS AND SCULPTURAL ELEMENTS IN THE WORKS OF JASPER JOHNS AND ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

In Chapter One, I traced how Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg's early work employs printed materials such as newspaper and cardboard to reconsider the negation of mass production as an artistic technique and renegotiate artistic facture; I showed how Johns and Rauschenberg merge traditional methods such as encaustic, sculpture, and painting with printed materials to provide an investigation of the distinctions between high art and reproduced material. Johns and Rauschenberg also utilize man-made objects in their work to add extra significance about artistic creation to the aforementioned dynamic produced by their work. Taking this one step further, Johns makes replica sculptures of found objects and casts of the human body while Rauschenberg creates combines entirely from found objects. In this chapter, I will use Leo Steinberg's theories about the flatbed picture plane to examine Johns and Rauschenberg's use of three-dimensional components in their works; I propose that Johns and Rauschenberg include found objects and make replicas of items to manipulate and reinterpret ready-mades in order to assert and undermine simultaneously the concept of and the viewer's complacency toward everyday objects.

Johns and Rauschenberg's use of everyday objects in their work represents an overarching shift of the picture plane in modern art. In his article "Other Criteria: The Flatbed Picture Plane," Leo Steinberg argues there was a change in the orientation of modern art in the 1950s that produced important shifts in the perception of the artwork. Steinberg asserts that the traditional orientation of the picture plane used by the Old Masters relied on "the erect human

posture.”⁶⁴ He argues that artists such as Mark Rothko, Henri Matisse, and Jackson Pollock still oriented their canvases vertically, even when taking into consideration the method by which Pollock created drip paintings on the floor, because Pollock “lived with the painting in its upright state, as with a world confronting his human posture.”⁶⁵ He describes how painting changed around 1950 with artists such as Rauschenberg and Jean Dubuffet; they removed the head-to-toe directionality and instead alluded to “any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed or impressed.” Because the new directionality of the canvas changed from upright to horizontal, “the psychic address of the image, its special mode of imaginative confrontation” shifted within the work as well. Steinberg argues that this new art is “radically different from the transparent picture plane with its optical correspondence to man’s visual field.” Steinberg “regard[s] the tilt of the picture plane from vertical to horizontal as expressive of the most radical shift in the subject matter of art, the shift from nature to culture.”⁶⁶ It is within this alteration that Johns and Rauschenberg work with objects.

Johns and Rauschenberg’s use of everyday objects represents the shift from nature to culture, as their works no longer focused on the viewer’s relationship with natural elements but instead on the confrontations with cultural objects. Describing how Rauschenberg’s work exemplifies the flatbed picture plane, Steinberg includes examples dating from the late 1940s to 1963. Through Rauschenberg’s example, Steinberg emphasizes how the new flatbed picture plane is “a surface to which anything reachable-thinkable would adhere. It had to be whatever a

⁶⁴ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 82.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 84.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 84. Steinberg disregards works from other artist of the past that could possibly fit into this description, such as Bosch’s *Table Top with the Seven Deadly Sins*. Although his analysis is not necessarily a new phenomenon in the modern period, his work still describes a broader shift in mid-twentieth century art, and he provides a dynamic framework in which to read Johns and Rauschenberg’s work.

billboard or dashboard is, and everything a projection screen is, with further affinities for anything that is flat.”⁶⁷ Steinberg concludes that the importance of the flatbed picture plane can be understood “as a change within painting that changed the relationship between artist and image, image and viewer.”⁶⁸ He asserts that this transformation is a result of the changes far beyond the picture plane and extends to all categories of life. Although Steinberg mentions Johns, he does not elaborate on how the same ‘flatness’ that exists in Rauschenberg’s work is also the driving force behind Johns’s practice. The works discussed in Chapter One by Johns and Rauschenberg that utilize newspaper are early examples of Steinberg’s flatbed picture plane. *Flag* and the Black Paintings consist of physical printed materials of culture and are oriented toward a horizontal plane of everyday life. They are also the first of their works to push the viewer to think differently about art, but they lack the direct confrontation with objects from the viewer’s culture because they represent ideas of modern life instead of containing artifacts from it. Johns and Rauschenberg’s subsequent works that utilize everyday items represent Steinberg’s concept to the fullest degree.

Although Steinberg argues that Rauschenberg’s *Bed* (1955) (Figure 2.1) was his most profound gesture of the horizontal/vertical struggle, he does not take his analysis of the work far enough. In *Bed*, Rauschenberg took the pillow, sheet, and quilt from his own bed, covered the upper portion in splashes of red, white, yellow, blue, brown, and black paint, affixed it to wood supports, and hung it on the wall. Steinberg attributes the importance of this work to the physicality of the piece, and the shift occurs because *Bed* “refers back to the horizontal on which we walk and sit, work and sleep.”⁶⁹ Although this is true, Rauschenberg’s shift from “nature to culture” extends beyond the simple change in orientation. Rauschenberg uses *Bed* to mediate a

⁶⁷ Ibid, 88.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 91.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 87.

confrontation between the viewer and objects from their everyday life within an art context. The bed is human sized; Rauschenberg presents the environment in which the body of the viewer could potentially reside but removes the option of interaction. Rauschenberg plays with the idea of perception because he turns the bed on its foot, which takes away the possibility that a person could crawl into the bed and thus allow the bed to fulfill its purpose. The viewers' relationship to *Bed* is different to their relationship to their own bedding because it is in an art gallery, hung on a wall, and covered in paint. Although Rauschenberg presents an ordinary bed, it is in an art gallery, which automatically shifts the relationship with the object. The viewer would not try to climb into the bed, for example, not only because it is hanging on the wall at an angle that would make the feat impossible, but an art object is not meant to be used in such a way. Even though the viewer would recognize the bed as an object that he or she would be familiar with, it is obviously not their bed due to its placement and classification as art object. In this way, the viewers' relationship to the bed is complicated and multifaceted. It is not their own personal bed, but it is an actual bed and therefore has calls to mind similar associations. Through this shift, Rauschenberg creates tension between nature and culture as well as art and life. Steinberg asserts that what Rauschenberg "invented above all was... a pictorial surface that let the world in again"; to take Steinberg further, Rauschenberg lets the viewers in again, depicts the elements around them, engenders contemplation of the objects, and then plays with the distance inherent in art representation in order to push them out of their comfort zone and confront them with everyday objects they might typically ignore or otherwise take for granted.⁷⁰

Bed includes references to everyday life that were previously manifested through Rauschenberg's use of newspaper but that are now visible through the tension between the ready-made objects, the pictorial field, and the items and practices insinuated by them. Rauschenberg

⁷⁰ Ibid, 90.

smears varying shades of red, yellow, blue, black, white, and brown paint across the bedspread, which, much like the allusions suggested by Helen Molesworth discussed in Chapter One in relation to the artist's use of newspapers, refers back to the everyday bodily functions of the viewer. Since a bed is a place where one inhabits and performs various activities, the paint symbolizes the remnants humans leave behind on it. Skin is shed and bodily fluids such as saliva and semen end up on the sheets, which show signs of life within the bed. The paint that Rauschenberg slings across the material alludes to these stains left behind from living, which creates a different type of reference to the everyday culture of the viewer similar to that presented by Molesworth and Steinberg. Because of this allusion, *Bed* not only represents the flatbed picture plane because of its manipulation of the vertical orientation but also because of its close relationship to the everyday culture of the viewer as well; it also evokes a phenomenological connection to everyday life. Despite this connection, it remains a constructed phenomenon; although these allusions can be understood and expanded, the work still remains a work of art. This is the niche in which Rauschenberg and Johns work; they create works that evoke connections with the viewer on a level beyond the visual, but they remain very obviously art objects through their construction and plane orientation. It is within this gap between everyday object and art work that Rauschenberg and Johns create their work. The connection to culture through the use of found objects blurs the line between art and life, but the relationship the viewer has with the piece as separate but related to their own personal life sustains the psychic distance necessary for the work to remain an art object while still referential and meaningful.

Johns uses everyday items in a similar fashion in order to convey the shift from nature to culture suggested by Steinberg's flatbed picture plane. Johns's work *Shade* (1959) (Figure 2.2)

was one of the first works in which he utilized a found object. The piece consists of a large shade affixed to a canvas that extends toward the window ledge secured to the bottom; brush strokes of white, black, light green, and dark green decorate the surface of the shade, the ledge, and the visible canvas. Unlike his previous works in which the objects represented are painted such as *Flag* (1954-55) (Figure 1.3), Johns affixes three-dimensional found objects to the canvas in *Shade*. This changes the way the viewer connects with the work of art; much like *Bed*, *Shade* no longer exists as simply an image because the three-dimensional element shifts the piece from the visual to the physical and relates specifically to the everyday life of the viewer. A shade is an object that could be used by anyone, but Johns's manipulation of the surface of shade shifts the work across the line between everyday object and art and, much like *Bed*, relates to the viewer while remaining a distinct art piece.

Shade illustrates Steinberg's concept of the flatbed picture plane through Johns's technique and subject matter. Johns uses visible brush strokes that extend with no destination in mind, and they weave in and out of the borders of the shade with no regards to the classic method of space and design. Steinberg argues that whenever Rauschenberg's works "threatened to evoke a topical illusion of depth, the surface was casually stained or smeared with paint to recall its irreducible flatness," which can be seen in his use of paint in *Bed*; Johns utilizes the same method and sensibility in *Shade*.⁷¹ He renders the paint in large brushstrokes across the entire work to disguise the edges of the shade; this illustrates the way Johns layers the paint atop the shade to showcase its "irreducible flatness" against the canvas. Johns uses the flatbed picture plane in order to call the viewers' attention to the actual surface of the image. Similar to the way Johns uses the materials in *Flag*, both artists use the found materials used in *Shade* and *Bed* to suggest physical objects and items in their lives; like the encaustic method of *Flag*, the new

⁷¹ Ibid, 88.

works attempted to convey the processes used in artistic creation and, by extension, assert the artists' hands in the creation of the works. Johns's exaggerated brush strokes illustrate how his hand reacted with the canvas and Rauschenberg's splatters of paint show the trajectory his brush took across the work. The color variation in *Shade* illustrates Johns's process; the dark green paint must have been wet when the white was applied due to the brighter green color formed in certain places where these two colors overlap. When examined closely, Rauschenberg's splatters of paint can be seen to overlap and the order of application can be determined. Like the newspaper in *Flag* and the Black Paintings, Johns and Rauschenberg use the readymade objects as the material basis in their pieces that they then paint as if they were a canvas.

Johns's use of the window also accentuates how Steinberg's flatbed picture plane theory encompasses his work. A painting in the history of art has often been perceived as a window into another space and time, and the ability to create such an image is the mark of a true master. The new generation to which Steinberg refers moves to change this idea; Johns literally does so when he makes *Shade*. Johns creates a window but chooses to lower a shade over the entire piece, which allows none of the space behind it to be seen. With *Shade*, Johns not only disregards the natural depiction that the viewer usually sees, he stops the viewers' gaze from entering the image at all. As in *Bed*, the gaze is hindered from extending beyond the picture plane, which is the distinguishing factor of the flatbed picture plane. Johns dangles the idea of the gaze in front of the viewer but deters him or her from ever seeing beyond the shade. Johns embraces "the expansion of the work-surface picture plane to the man-sized environmental scale of Abstract Expressionism," turns it horizontally, and connects it back to the viewer's physical world.⁷² Since the window, like *Bed*, is life-size, the viewer relates to the piece physically but, despite the immediate connection, Johns confronts and tears apart any preconceptions about the work. He

⁷² Ibid, 85.

plays with the viewer in the way he manipulates what Steinberg calls “the psychic address of the image, its special mode of imaginative confrontation.”⁷³ Johns presents the viewer with a receptacle for looking but does not allow them to look beyond its opaque surface. This is the same kind of push and pull with the gaze that was discussed in relation to the almost visible print on the surface of *Flag* and *Asheville Citizen* in Chapter One. The viewer can imagine what might be behind the shade, but Johns constructs the image in a way that disallows any further gazing beyond the work itself.

Rauschenberg uses the commonplace nature of the objects in his combine paintings to create a tension similar to the one employed by Johns between image and viewer through the utilization of Steinberg’s flatbed picture plane. Brandon W. Joseph describes two distinct categories of Rauschenberg’s combine paintings: the early, subjective, personal archival series and the later, objective, universal archival series.⁷⁴ However, this distinction is, perhaps, overstated. Rauschenberg intentionally made his works reflections of life, whether it is of his own or of his viewers. He asserts that he “want[s] my paintings to be reflections of life... a reflection of your surroundings.”⁷⁵ When he constructed his works, he was interested “to find ways where the imagery, the material and the meaning of the painting would be, not an illustration of my will, but more like an unbiased documentation of what I observed, letting the area of feeling and meaning take care of itself.”⁷⁶ Rauschenberg’s description bears similarity to Steinberg’s explanation of the flatbed picture plane as “any receptor surface on which objects are scattered.” The combine paintings are works that include “scattered” objects from all ranges of

⁷³ Ibid, 84.

⁷⁴ Brandon W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2003), 139-166.

⁷⁵ Robert Rauschenberg, interviewed in Barbara Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg*, Elizabeth Avedon Editions (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), 72.

⁷⁶ Rauschenberg, *Interview*, 72. Although Rauschenberg states he wants to be objective, it is difficult to be completely objective in a situation such as his; artistic decisions are very rarely completely objective. However, his statement does shed a light on his process.

Rauschenberg's experiences that he brought together in one work in order to create rich, complicated visual fields full of every objects. Jonathan Fineberg argues that "the objects make the experience of the painting seem more 'real,'" where real signifies the objects immediate existence in the "here and now" discussed on the Introduction.⁷⁷ The viewers' comprehension of the cultural aspects of Rauschenberg's combines, and his work in general, rely on the viewers' understanding of the references and experiences of real cultural items outside of the work of art. Fineberg describes how, "instead of discovering oneself in the act of painting, Rauschenberg's practice implied a perpetual reconstruction of the self by adapting to encounters with the world."⁷⁸ Rauschenberg and Johns's works force viewers out of the works and into the culture in which they live in order to make them rethink and reinterpret their relationship to and the larger position of the found object as a cultural object recreated as an artwork. It is through the use of found items that Rauschenberg illustrates this in his combines.

In the early *Short Circuit* (1955) (Figure 2.3), Rauschenberg used found objects such as fabric, photographs, and works by other artists. The combine consists of a strip of beige lace stretched across the bottom; a small swatch of polka dot fabric; random bits of paper and two photographs glued to the surface; strokes of paint in green, red, black and white paint littered throughout; the word "open" and an arrow pointing up toward the small cabinet square above it; two small cabinet-like squares with hinged doors that house a small painted version of Johns's *Flag* and a small oil painting by Susan Weil; and a program for a John Cage concert.⁷⁹ These components act as an archive of various elements of Rauschenberg's interactions and observations during the creation of the piece, which, in turn, become the scattered objects of the

⁷⁷ Jonathan Fineberg, "Personal Selection: Robert Rauschenberg's Reservoir," *American Art* 12:1 (Spring 1998): 84-88.

⁷⁸ Fineberg, "Personal Selection," 85.

⁷⁹ Joseph, *Random Order*, 139.

flatbed picture plane. The various parts of *Short Circuit* depict a snap shot of Rauschenberg's experiences and, despite Joseph's claims that it is an early personal piece, it can be read as a unique art object with cultural significance. Within this work, each portion of the "materials came with external associations that [Rauschenberg] pointedly sought to retain."⁸⁰ Each element of the work has intrinsic connections that exist outside of the piece and the possibilities for these aspects are endless. The hinged doors work much like the shade in Johns's work; there is potential for movement and experience, but the classification of the piece as a work of art prevents the interaction. This is another instance in which Rauschenberg distances his work from the viewer; although there is a connection to the viewers' everyday existence, it is a disconnected experience because of their relationship to the art object. In other words, Rauschenberg's infuses the aura back into the everyday objects through his distancing of the object despite the phenomenological connection to the viewer. Since the work has the instructions to "open" the hinged door, the relationship between action and inaction on the part of the viewer illustrates the tense distinctions between art and everyday cultural objects; the ready-mades provide a constant reminder that, despite their appearance as usable objects, they remain art works.

Rauschenberg's later combine painting *First Landing Jump* (1961) (Figure 2.4) illustrates a more industrial, detached version of his archival works. The work consists of a beige wooden backdrop covered half in black cloth with an old crank shaft affixed at the top, a short spiral of iron wire coming from the top, and a collection of found items such as a license plate fastened to the canvas in the lower left corner. A piece of wood from a road barrier extends from underneath the fabric down past the edge of the frame and onto the floor with a tire attached to the end. These elements evoke with the city in which Rauschenberg lived and worked at the time. Most viewers would have ready associations for each element in this work, though much less specific

⁸⁰ Fineberg, "Personal Selection," 87.

than those conjured by *Short Circuit*. This work becomes like a road map of Rauschenberg's experiences and the viewer follows the trajectory as he or she picks apart each distinct element and relates them to the whole. The same tension exists within this piece that exists in *Short Circuit*; the objects presented in the work are everyday objects that have shifted their functionality from usable cultural item to art work.

Much like Rauschenberg, Johns creates tension between images, words, and objects in *Zone* (1961) (Figure 2.5) as a way to play with the viewers' expectations of everyday objects and art. Johns hangs a used paintbrush from the top of the work and attaches a coffee cup to the right edge of the painted canvas. The painted portion of the canvas resembles many of Johns's other works, with large areas of gray and white brushstrokes and stenciled letters across the bottom. The title is stenciled across the bottom of the canvas, but, unlike in his other works, Johns mirrors the letters directly behind one another; a large dark gray "zone" is superimposed with a smaller, light gray "zone". This double image creates the same kind of push and pull visually that the found objects create physically because the viewers' eye bounces back and forth between the two variant depictions. As Rauschenberg does when he writes "open" in *Short Circuit*, Johns intensifies this dynamic by writing in his own handwriting on the canvas. Johns writes the word "cup" and draws an arrow pointing to the cup he affixes to the canvas. Like Rauschenberg, Johns plays with the viewers' relationship with the piece; he paints a sign that seems to invite the viewer to take the cup off of the work, but given that it is an artwork and that the cup is covered in paint and securely attached to the canvas, the same tension created in Rauschenberg's combines manifests. Much like Johns's handwriting-like brushwork discussed in Chapter One, Johns literally writes on the canvas in his own script; by placing his own writing next to the found object, Johns creates an intensified dynamism that was only alluded to in his earlier works.

Instead of painting handwriting-like brushstrokes over found materials in a cohesive unit, Johns presents two distinct elements in *Zone* in order to throw the distinction between personal and generic and between art and life into starker relief.

Much like Rauschenberg does in his Combines, Johns utilizes found objects in his works in order to challenge the division between artistic creation and mass production. The addition of the found objects elevates *Zone* above *Shade* and intensifies the shift Steinberg discusses. Johns presents the viewer with generic items that evoke various associations, though the paintbrush does have a personal, work specific undertone. *Zone* is a combination of the two types of combines Rauschenberg produced because of the types of found objects Johns utilizes. The coffee cup is common and mass produced and therefore impersonal while the paintbrush ties into the creation of the painting and therefore becomes a personal, self-referential element within the piece. Similar to the traces left on his other pieces that reveal his artistic facture, Johns presents the viewer with the physical tool with which he creates his work. In this way, the paintbrush is work specific to this piece; however, the generic quality of the brush's construction gives it an air of impersonality that makes it relatable to each viewer. The paintbrush has no distinguishing feature, which allows it to become a stand in for any kind of paintbrush the viewer can conjure in their own experience. The factory-made paintbrush was not created by Johns, but the painting behind the object was created using the mass-produced paintbrush Johns affixes to the canvas. Although the paintbrush was not made by Johns, it still is part of the art piece as a whole. Much like the doors on *Short Circuit*, this paintbrush is unable to be used and acts as a visual element, which strengthens the distinction between object and art. The visual play between reproduced object and unique work creates dynamism within the piece that challenges the ideas of originality.

Zone and the combine paintings link back to Steinberg's concept of the shift in modern art. Steinberg asserts Johns's subjects "are man-made things... [that] are commonplace in our environment."⁸¹ Since they are man-made, the objects are cultural objects that exist in the viewers' everyday life like those in Rauschenberg's combine paintings. This relates back to Steinberg's characterization of the flatbed picture plane, which he asserts "accommodates recognizable objects... [and] presents them as man-made things of universally familiar character."⁸² Objects would not be mundane if they did not come into close contact with humans on a daily basis; this links Johns and Rauschenberg's work with everyday life. Through their integration of man-made objects into their images, Johns and Rauschenberg add an extra layer of meaning and interpretation within their work that illustrate the "familiar character" of each element. Through their techniques and the tension between mass-production and artistic creation, Johns and Rauschenberg's works can be classified as part of Steinberg's new picture plane, and also undermine Benjamin's classification of mass produced objects as non-art objects.

Johns uses various forms of painting, sculpture, and casting in his works to show the tension between replication, artistic production, and the found object; through this amalgamation of elements, Johns takes Steinberg's flatbed picture plane one step further than before. *Watchman* (1964) (Figure 2.6) illustrates Johns's combination of mechanically made objects and traditional artistic methods. The work consists of two bound canvases covered in green, grey, black, blue, orange, red, and yellow paint in scattered patterns that range from visible brushstrokes to stenciled letters to drips. The top right hand corner contains an upside-down chair that holds a wax cast of a leg. A wooden ledge extends out from the canvas that holds a slanted piece of wood and a ball. This work utilizes numerous mass produced objects: the

⁸¹ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 26.

⁸² *Ibid*, 90.

stenciled letters, the chair, the wood, and the ball. Johns juxtaposes these elements with paint and in doing so, creates tension with the piece. The stenciled letters are visible underneath the thin layer of black paint over the left side of the image. Although the letters are painted, the stencil used to create the letters is mechanized like the one used on *Zone*. The chair is a mass produced piece of furniture; instead of making a chair himself, Johns uses a chair he bought, another product of the age of mass production. The wood and ball are readymade objects and, like the chair, affixed to the canvas and painted, again merging replication with traditional forms of production.

Unlike the three-dimensional elements of *Shade* and *Zone*, the found objects in *Watchman* are not painted to merge with the background, which makes them distinct from the flat frame of the canvas while still embodying the elements necessary to relate to Steinberg's assertions about the shift in art. Although Rauschenberg's *First Landing Jump* had more distinct three-dimensional layers than *Bed*, *Shade*, and *Zone*, it still existed as a mostly flat image oriented along a similar axis. *Watchman* is the first work to utilize the objects in order to take the piece one step further than simple plane orientation; *Watchman* contains the cultural elements necessary but breaks through the associations of a flat, scattered desk and orients the picture plane closer to the viewer and in multiple directions at once. The chair and wax leg shift the work upside down in one direction while the stenciled words and other found objects suggest another orientation entirely. The extra layer of tension Johns creates adds visual depth and dynamism to his work that has been absent from the others discussed.

The wax leg in *Watchman* creates simultaneous tension between found object and sculpture and between replicated object and its source. Johns creates the casts himself, but he uses models in order to create them. Although his technique could yield multiple, identical

versions, Johns amplifies the originality of the cast he makes in *Watchman* through the lines of facture he leaves on the leg. Around the knee portion of the cast, there are two slits where wax built up in a ridge in the mold. Instead of removing these areas of excess wax, Johns chose to leave the remnants of facture behind. In the same way he uses visible brushstrokes or visible newspaper bits in his encaustic works, the lines of wax left visible is an assertion of his presence as the artist of the work and highlights his involvement in the creation of a piece that could easily be mistaken as a found object. The rough edges at the upper part of the leg cast illustrate Johns control over the creation of the cast; the misshapen ridges which could have easily been smoothed out showcase Johns's interest in the visual cues of his artistic creation. Through this distinctive technique, Johns makes his own version of the everyday mass produced objects that litter the canvas.

Johns uses casts in other works such as *Target with Four Faces* (1955) (Figure 2.7), and the juxtaposition of multiple casts within one work intensifies the dynamics of *Watchman*. In *Target with Four Faces*, the top of the work consists of a hinged box that opens to four orange casts of faces, each cut off at the cheeks on the sides, above the nose at the top, and in the middle of the chin at the bottom. Considering that each cast was made from a face mold of Johns's friend Fance Stevenson, they at first appear to be the same.⁸³ When examined closer, however, each one of the casts has a slight variation of lip position. This creates visual movement within the casts and makes each one distinct from the others; it also illustrates how Johns creates each piece. Although the casts were made from the same face, the minute differences illustrate Johns's artistic facture, and, as a result, the casts become original creations despite their initial appearance as manufactured copies. Although the dynamic between the model-as-original and cast-as-copy still exists, the use of multiple casts of the same body part in serial fashion underlies

⁸³ Shannon, *Disappearance*, 87.

any relation to the model and instead intensifies the dynamic of originality and of objecthood between the casts within the image. In these works, Johns merges painting, sculpture, and found objects to manipulate the viewer's relationship with the found object and the work of art as well as the notion of the object in general. Through these casts, Johns links his additional creation with the ready-made ones; although the objects within each canvas, both found and created, seem to represent no more than they actually are, Johns manipulates them in *Watchman* and *Target with Four Faces* in such a way that they become unique works created by the artist and not simply found materials. In this way, Johns undermines Benjamin's claims that mass-produced objects cannot exist within the realm of artistic tradition.

Around the same time as his found object paintings, Johns creates sculptures that manipulate the preconceived notion of the found object; the tension created within the sculptures is as a commentary about the concepts of the original and mass produced. Johns makes sculptures that remove found objects from the flat canvas and push them into the space of the viewer. Johns produces a series of metal sculptures that include light bulbs, flashlights, and ale cans, just to name a few. His works are generally based on readymade objects that he casts and then paints or sculpts, sometimes both. Johns chooses the objects that he used in everyday life with their original categorization as objects because they "are Art not quite yet."⁸⁴ In all but one piece, Johns recreates the man-made object instead of using the found object; this "assures [Johns] that [his works] are makeable."⁸⁵ Steinberg asserts that while "the street and the sky... can only be *simulated* on canvas," the objects Johns chooses to portray in his sculptures and other works "can be *made*... [and] will represent no more than what [they] actually [are]."⁸⁶ Although Johns's works do represent what they are, they are more than just found objects; they

⁸⁴ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 33.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 27.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 28.

are original art objects created by the artist in a manner that resembles the found objects. Johns creates each of his sculptures by hand instead of relying on ready-mades; this illustrates Johns's preoccupation with artistic creation. Since this trend is also prevalent in his painting, his sculptures retain the same characterization even though Johns works outside of the picture plane.

As with many of his other works, Johns complicates the dynamic between art object and found object, between replica and original, with his sculpture *Flashlight I* (1958) (Figure 2.8). *Flashlight I* is the bridge sculpture between the found objects in his paintings and his other sculptures. Unlike the rest of his sculptures, *Flashlight I* is a ready-made flashlight covered in Sculpt Metal.⁸⁷ Johns does not present the flashlight as a found object but instead uses the found object as the base for his sculpture. Similar to the way Johns treated the American flag, the flashlight is a ubiquitous and easily recognizable object that Johns re-imagines in order to achieve understanding on “other levels.”⁸⁸ The addition of the Sculpt Metal transforms the work from simple ready-made into a piece manipulated by Johns. The Sculpt Metal covering undermines the crisp lines of a factory-produced object and alters the perception of the finished sculpture. Instead of a functional flashlight, *Flashlight I* is an artistic object manipulated by the hand of the artist. The clumps of Sculpt Metal on the work show the areas where Johns neglected to smooth the surface, and the lines around the mechanism of the switch are dull and inoperable.⁸⁹ Johns uses these visual distinctions to draw attention to the associations with the found object while he simultaneously engages in the dialogue about artistic creation. As with the objects Johns and Rauschenberg present in *Zone* and *Short Circuit*, the flashlight loses its original function and exists in the same liminal space between art work and functional object. Johns exaggerates this dynamic through the presentation of the flashlight; instead of a stand-

⁸⁷ Shannon, *Disappearance*, 62-63.

⁸⁸ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 31.

⁸⁹ Shannon, *Disappearance*, 62-63.

alone object, Johns elevates *Flashlight I* away from the base and presents it as an object that simultaneously looks like it could be used and appears as an art object; this secures *Flashlight I*'s place as a liminal object.

Walter Benjamin criticizes culture's reliance on mass productive techniques, and Johns's sculptures and Rauschenberg's combines complicate his analysis even more. Benjamin argues that "the authenticity of the thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it."⁹⁰ Although the history Benjamin discusses as essential to the art object is that of the history of art, the inherent history of the objects in Johns and Rauschenberg's works becomes the bridge between Benjamin and Steinberg's analysis of modern art and society. Benjamin argues that the replicated object has a new place in the history of art because of its new form and implications to the viewer, but each found object has a history of its own, just not the history Benjamin originally envisioned. Benjamin's loss of the aura is the same as Steinberg's shift from nature to culture; the work of art no longer relates to the history and plane orientation of the Old Masters and now exists within a culture filled with mass production and a history of its own. The distinct way in which Johns and Rauschenberg employ found objects showcases the tension between the consumer culture and the object used to represent it as well as fine art techniques and those manipulated by Johns and Rauschenberg to create original works from and of already mass produced objects.

Rauschenberg and Johns approach the ready-made object from two different perspectives but with very similar conclusions. Rauschenberg relies on the re-imagination of the found object in his pieces with little manipulation on his part aside from their inclusion in the work and integration within a greater whole; Johns utilizes found objects in a similar fashion to

⁹⁰ Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 22.

Rauschenberg but takes his work one step further through his creation of casts and sculptures. Steinberg's theories about the flatbed picture plane illustrate the ways that Johns and Rauschenberg use three-dimensional components in their works to represent a shift from nature to culture; although they still employ similar techniques to the works discussed in Chapter One, Johns and Rauschenberg include found objects and make replicas of items to manipulate and reinterpret ready-mades in order to emphasize and challenge the concept of and the viewer's complacency toward everyday objects simultaneously. At the same time, Johns and Rauschenberg create a relationship between art and life that, as Steinberg asserts, "let[s] the world back in" to art.⁹¹ Instead of creating art that distanced the viewer from the piece, Johns and Rauschenberg made works that included the viewers' own reality through the use of everyday objects; their approach simultaneously made the viewer reexamine the objects around them in order to see them as art objects and amalgamated art and life as a way to close the gap between high art and its audience. Johns and Rauschenberg continue their investigation of artistic originality and mass production through their use of self-replication.

⁹¹ Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, 90.



Figure 2.1 Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955, Oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports, 6' 3 1/4" x 31 1/2" x 8" (191.1 x 80 x 20.3 cm). Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 2.2 Jasper Johns, *Shade*, 1959, Encaustic on canvas with objects. 10 1/8 x 7 3/4 inches (25.7 x 19.6 cm). Private Collection.



Figure 2.3 Robert Rauschenberg, *Short Circuit*, 1955, Combine painting with oil, fabric, and paper on wood supports and cabinet with two hinged doors. 49 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 46 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 5 inches. Estate of Robert Rauschenberg.



Figure 2.4 Robert Rauschenberg, *First Landing Jump*, 1961, Combine painting with cloth, metal, leather, electric fixture, cable, and oil paint on composition board, automobile tire and wooden plank. 89 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 72 x 8 $\frac{7}{8}$ inches. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 2.5 Jasper Johns, *Zone*, 1962, oil, encaustic, and collage on canvas with objects, 60 ¼ x 36 inches. Kunsthau, Zurich.



Figure 2.6 Jasper Johns, *Watchman*, 1964, oil on canvas with objects, 85 x 60 ¼ inches. Eli and Edythe L Broad Collection, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles.

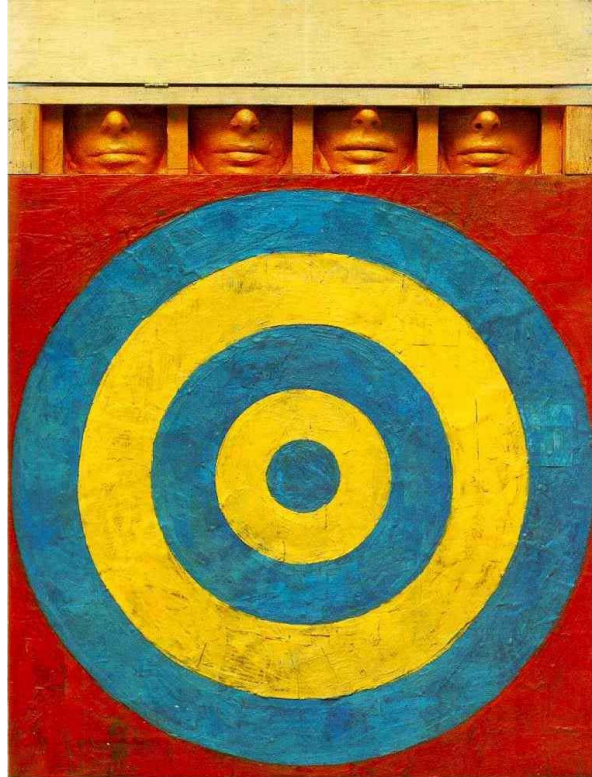


Figure 2.7 Jasper Johns, *Target With Four Faces*, 1955, encaustic on newspaper and cloth over canvas surmounted by four tinted-plaster faces in wood box with hinged front, 33 9/16 x 26 x 3 inches. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 2.8 Jasper Johns, *Flashlight I*, 1958, Sculpt-Metal over flashlight and wood, 5 1/4 x 9 1/8 x 3 7/8 inches, Sonnabend Collection.

CHAPTER THREE: MAKING SOMETHING BORING INTERESTING AGAIN: THE SELF REPLICATION OF JASPER JOHNS AND ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG⁹²

In previous chapters, I traced the ways Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg's early work utilize printed materials such as newspaper and cardboard to reexamine mass production and renegotiate artistic facture; I also discussed their manipulation and reinterpretation of ready-made objects to assert and undermine the concept of and the viewers' complacency toward everyday objects simultaneously. I showed how Johns and Rauschenberg merge traditional methods such as encaustic, sculpture, and painting with reproduced and mass produced materials to provide an investigation of the Benjaminian distinction between art – mainly painting and sculpture– and printed, reproduced material. I also illustrated their challenge to the ways in which the legitimacy and stability of the role of the artist was under attack in the age of mechanical reproduction in the 1950s and 1960s. In this final chapter, I examine Johns and Rauschenberg's use of mass reproductive techniques, mainly lithography and silk screening, to replicate their own work in order to create a tension between the original and the copy, and between the authentic and the counterfeit. I also investigate their manipulation of painting that made their work appear reproduced and self-referential as a way to scrutinize the connection between painting and mass production.

Johns's technique in the lithographic portfolio *0-9* (1960-63) (Figure 3.1) directly confronts Benjamin's notion of authenticity. Benjamin argues:

The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technology – and of course not only technology – reproduction... It might be stated as a general formula that the technology of

⁹² Based on a quote about Johns's work from John Cage, who hoped "the repetition of something boring might make it interesting again." In Riva Castleman, *Jasper Johns: A Print Retrospective* (New York: New York Graphic Society Books, 1986), 20.

reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence.⁹³

Benjamin links technology and reproduction with a lack of unique existence, but Johns manipulates the lithographic process in order to give authenticity and originality to works created from a technique of mass production. Historically, lithographs were “distinguished by the fact that the drawing is traced on a stone... [and this] first made it possible for graphic art to market its product not only in large numbers, as previously, but in daily changing variations.”⁹⁴

Although Johns utilized this technique for numerous works, the method he used with the *0-9* portfolio manipulated the traditional technique in order to create distinctive works of art.

Traditionally, a separate stone is used for each aspect of a print, and the same holds true for the majority of Johns’s work; most of Johns’s lithographic series use multiple stones and illustrate his “fondness for... their inherent retention of actions, as they continue to exist on separate stones and plates.”⁹⁵ This is not the case, however, for the *0-9* portfolio, which used one stone for the entire series; this makes the portfolio stand apart from the other lithographic works he creates.⁹⁶ Instead of making a different stone for each numeral, one “stone was changed throughout the printing of the edition.”⁹⁷ Since the same stone was manipulated between each number, the number of copies made from each stone was limited and “a strict time sequence [was] imposed on the creative activity.”⁹⁸ Johns made three *0-9* portfolios, one in color, black, and gray, respectively, and each number of the three colors was made in a specific, traceable order. Once the stone was changed for the next number, it would have been impossible to make

⁹³ Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 21-22. Although he discusses photographic reproduction in such harsh terms, his general abhorrence toward technological reproduction can be used to examine the technological developments in lithography.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁹⁵ Castleman, *Jasper Johns*, 21.

⁹⁶ Richard S. Field, *Jasper Johns Prints: 1960-1970* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), Note for Figures 37-46, np.

⁹⁷ Fields, *Jasper Johns*, np.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

another edition of the previous number because the stone no longer existed. The system of symbols he chooses to depict – numbers – also contributes to its originality; each work is “the number itself” and the series portrays, according to critic Max Kozloff, “configurations that are conventionalized to begin with and cannot be ‘rendered’ or duplicated without becoming originals.”⁹⁹ Kozloff classifies numbers as entities that become originals as soon as they are rendered; in other words, there is not such thing as an authentic number because each rendition of the number is authentic. With each replication, the numbers remain specific. Although the lithographic process was originally intended to make graphic art in large numbers, Johns undermines this tradition with his manipulation of the stone; the lithographs made from the stone became exceptional as soon as he changed the stone for the next number. Although this method is outside of Johns’s lithographic practice, Johns manages to imbue this series of lithographs with a “unique existence” despite their conception from a method of mass production.

Johns’s treatment of the lithographic stone relates to his interest in artistic facture; he did not make a simple, straightforward graphic image on the stone but retained many of the elements he used in painting. Johns incorporates gestures, painterly strokes, and scribbles into the lithographic plates, which can be seen in the figure 4 in red. The lithograph consists of a large red 4 in the bottom two-thirds of the work with two red gridded lines of the numbers 0-9 in the top third. The structured outline of the stenciled large 4 is apparent, but the crisp lines created are covered with scribbles and smudges that seem spontaneous compared to the controlled borders of the numeral. The grid of numbers, also stenciled, contains thickly inked areas that appear like paint gestures with scribbles and textures throughout. Although the lithograph was inked on the paper, the manner in which Johns manipulated the stone creates an allusion to the immediacy of

⁹⁹ Max Kozloff, “Jasper Johns,” in *Renderings: Critical Essays on a Century of Modern Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 208.

the artist's hand; because of the way he inscribes his gestures, the marks on the stone are quite distinctly hand drawn and the resulting lithograph seems to be by Johns's hand, not a mechanical process. Johns included a fingerprint in the lower right corner of the stone, which is a literal inscription of his identity onto the work. Although fingerprints can be counterfeited, Johns alludes to the handmade creation of this work through his inclusion of the fingerprint; it is as though the artist, when making the print, accidentally marred the surface with his inked finger, which gives the print the same kind of immediacy that resulted from Johns's gestures. The print of 6 also insinuates the artist's hand in a different way; there are large areas around the edge of the 6 that have been erased in wide strokes. The contours around the inside edges of the 6 are erased enough that only a faint amount of the brown ink was transferred to the paper. The haphazard erasure marks around the outside of the 6 indicate the physical gesture of the artist, which evokes the presence of the artist's hand although it was created with a replicative method.

The manipulation of a singular lithographic stone illustrates Johns's tendency for self-referential elements with his work. Johns did not simply erase the previous number from the stone when he created each successive numeral. He instead left elements of the previous numbers on the stone so the connection between each of the numbers in the series would be apparent due to the "sequential pattern [that] is inseparable from each image... [where] traces of former numerals are almost always found behind, around, or incorporated into the succeeding one."¹⁰⁰ Between the 0 and 1, Johns changed very little; the 1 was inscribed in the circular space in the center of the 0 and traces of the outside edges of the 0 can be seen in the outer edges of the 1. Johns reworked a great amount of the stone between 1 and 2, but the thick inky portions and the uneven edges in the lower left-hand corner are still apparent. As discussed in relation to the 4, the prints of 2 and 3 also contain a fingerprint in the lower right-hand corner of the inked area,

¹⁰⁰ Fields, *Jasper Johns*, np.

linking the three prints together through a common visual element. Since these works were created as a portfolio series, the works “most likely would be seen together, hung in frames, forming one extremely striking wall object.”¹⁰¹ Like the gestures on the surfaces of Johns’s paintings discussed in Chapter One, the scribbles, strokes, and other Johnnian gestures he drew upon the stone and inked on the prints become a “kind of handwriting [that] demonstrate[s] a personal touch” that illustrates Johns’s interest in his role as the artist and the creation of inimitable objects despite the mechanical production of the prints.¹⁰² Throughout these pieces, Johns refers back to himself within each successive work; one piece builds on the previous work, and each contain the remnants, the “handwriting” of the previous prints. In this way, the series becomes a physical representation of artistic process, where every step of the piece is represented in its own separate piece, especially considering the works were meant to be viewed together. Through this series, Johns amalgamates the distinctions between individual and authentic in order to show the complicated, yet interconnected, relationship they have to reproduction.

Although the prints are the art objects to come out of the lithographic series, Johns’s treatment of the same stone calls into question what can be considered the “unique” work of art. Johns uses the stone and inscribes the elements onto the stone instead of the paper; the paper simply displays the ink impressions of the stone, which is the actual object that Johns manipulates. Given that the lithographs are copies of the images on the stone, they are replicas of the surface of the object on which Johns worked, but since that is the way in which lithography works, the result is accepted as the actual art piece. Johns makes it clear that he destroys the lithographic representation of the work with the *0-9* portfolio, therefore making non-reproducible prints created from the now-destroyed stone. Johns understood the effort that went into the plates

¹⁰¹ Castleman, *Jasper Johns*, 29.

¹⁰² Orton, *Figuring Johns*, 118.

was a record of his actions and was cognizant that the stones had a use and an identity as art outside of their classification as simple tools. Benjamin claimed that film technology and photographic reproduction were the reason for the decline of the aura and that their use could not lead to an art object. If Benjamin was interested in the object on which Johns actually worked, the stone would become the art object, but since it is traditionally regarded as a tool in a reproductive process, the stone does not hold the same value as the art object and mostly vouches for the origin of the print. The paradox that surfaces from this analysis represents the multi-faceted nature of Johns's lithographs; the creation of the lithographs creates complications between the original/copy dichotomy to which Benjamin alludes because the lines between the two become blurred when viewed in relation to this series. Through his manipulation of the lithographic stone, and through his successive series of numbers from this stone, Johns disproves Benjamin's assumption through his use of a reproductive process to create an exceptional, aura-infused object.

Johns's use of color and ink concentrations within the three different editions of the *0-9* series demonstrate his ability to make unique art objects from an identical stone. Although the same stone was used on each number in the series, each numeral is not identical to the same number from a different series. The gray 4 (Figure 3.2) varies a great deal from the red 4 in the color series. Unlike the sparse background of the red 4 and black 4 (Figure 3.3), the gray 4's background is covered in ink; the scribbled lines and outline of the 4 are a darker variant of gray and stand out from the ink saturated background. Due to the drenched color of the background, the fingerprint, one of the most distinguishing factors of the other 4s, becomes almost invisible; the swirls in the pad of the finger are barely legible and the specific aspect of the print fade away. Paradoxically, the shift of focus on the fingerprint, an aspect that highlighted the distinguishing

qualities of the red 4 and black 4, makes the gray 4 more distinctive because it separates it from the composition of the others. The change in color makes the gray 9 and black 9 (Figure 3.4-3.5) very different from the white 9. The white 9 almost fades into the background because the similarity in color between the paint and paper; the use of gray and black ink on the other two series creates a stark contrast between the images. The white 9 seems subtle and calm, but the black 9 and gray 9 are more dynamic and busy prints. The density of line is impossible to see in the white 9, but the two other prints become thick, solid blocks with just a faint trace of visible paper where Johns drew the number outlines. Johns uses lines scribbled in divergent directions to distinguish between the inside and outside of the 9. For these series, although the overall compositions are the same, the slight variation between the numeral images gives the works the “auras,” the “unique existences” that Benjamin claimed were not possible from reproduction. Johns manages to manipulate his technique and materials in such a way that the results are paradoxical works of art that simultaneously exist as mass produced objects that exude individuality.

The three portfolios of 0-9 are limited edition prints; this enhances the paradoxical relationship between inimitability and reproduction within the series. At the bottom of each work, Johns inscribes a number that indicates that print was in the series, signed his name, and wrote the year they were printed (Figure 3.6). This emphasized that the works were different from the other objects. Johns also distinguishes between the works in the series and the test pieces he made during the creation process by writing “artists proofs” across the bottom (Figure 3.7). This demonstrates that Johns was particular about which pieces were the final products and which pieces were works in progress. For example, proof 2 is quite similar to the black 2 (Figure 3.8) since both are printed in black and the composition, color, and technique is almost identical;

the proofs for the other numbers follow the same trend. The categorization as a work in progress instead of finished product shows Johns's distinction between the pieces made in preparation and his final art objects. Johns also inscribed the number of the proof along the bottom, which made a limited edition out of them as well. The viewer would be unaware of Johns's technique and would not know that each piece is the only one of its kind since, as mentioned above, the type of lithography that Johns implements is unconventional; the assignment of limited edition numbers across the bottom of the works alerts the viewer to the works' uniqueness, place within the series, and connection to other works in the series. The three portfolios are considered three sets of the same ten limited edition prints.¹⁰³ However, given the aforementioned differences, Johns undermines the idea that limited edition sets are identical and instead creates authentic prints.

Johns's use of numbers beyond the *0-9* portfolios exemplifies his ability to reinvent and imagine the same subject matter across multiple mediums. Although numbers were one of Johns's most prevalent subjects, an examination of a few examples in different media illustrate his reinvention. Johns made a charcoal drawing, *0 through 9* (1960) (Figure 3.9), in which he drew each number over the top of the next number; in the same year, he made a lithograph that was almost the exact repetition of the sketch, except that he corrected a reversed numeral 8 in the lithograph.¹⁰⁴ The aluminum sculpture *0 through 9* (1961, cast 1966) (Figure 3.10) resembles what the lithographic plate of the *0 through 9* print would have looked like. 1960 was also the same year that the *0-9* portfolio was conceived; given this, Johns obviously had the interrelationship between the numbers in mind when he created each piece. Despite the similarity of these works:

The transformations that Johns effects in translating a work from one medium to another

¹⁰³ Fields, *Jasper Johns*, Notes of Figures 37-46, np.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, Notes for Figure 4.

do more than explore the surface qualities of each. Virtually every Johns print changes the syntax of our perceptions. Every version of each theme processes the data of the idea so that the interrelationship of subject, the work of art as a whole, the artist, and the spectator, is in constant flux.¹⁰⁵

Each iteration of the same theme creates distinct works that rely on medium, techniques, and materials for their unique existence. Although the composition is the same, the way the object is cast creates a different dynamic within each piece. The numbers in the drawing and lithograph could, in theory, be pulled apart and reordered into a successive line, but the physicality of the numbers fades into one another and the possibility of extraction disappears. In the aluminum sculpture, however, the traces of outlines and edges of multiple numbers are visible and it appears as though, given the thickness of the 9 depicted on top, each number could physically be pulled out of the work.

In the encaustic painting *White Numbers* (1957) (Figure 3.11), Johns utilizes the grid aspect of the 0-9 portfolio and the illusion of extractability in the *0 through 9* drawing, lithograph, and sculpture. Similar to the fingerprint in the red 4, the brushstrokes used to create the numbers on the canvas become the individual element representative of the artist, in effect his handwriting. Through Johns's utilization of mass-produced numbers, which become self-referential due to their continued use, and his depiction of the numbers across variant media, which calls attention to his presence and the creation of the work through technique, the individuality of the object and the role of the artist cannot be questioned. Johns told Walter Hopps in 1965 that "making one exactly like the other... doesn't particularly interest me... I like that there is the possibility that one might take the one for the other, but I also like that, with just a little examination, it's very clear that one is not the other."¹⁰⁶ Johns was aware of the

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Hopps, "Interview," 36.

similarities of his objects but relished in, even relied on, the distinctions between them to perpetuate his role as the artist.

Robert Rauschenberg's attraction to self-replication began when he undertook *Factum I* (1957) (Figure 3.12) and *Factum II* (1957) (Figure 3.13). Rauschenberg created the two works because he wanted to test his ability to "make two identical gestural paintings... 'to see... what the difference could be between the emotional content of one and the other.'"¹⁰⁷ He set out to replicate himself in a very straightforward manner in order to understand the relationship between an authentic, unique piece and a copy. Despite the titles' indication that one came before the other, Rauschenberg "worked on both canvases simultaneously – sometimes adding to one and then the other" so that, according to Rauschenberg, "neither one of these paintings was an imitation of the other."¹⁰⁸ Rauschenberg added the same brushstrokes, images, calendars, and newsprint to each work, and, despite his efforts to make identical gestural pieces, the canvases are quite different when examined closely side by side. The red brushstroke along the bottom is almost the same size but the thickness of paint differs between the two; the color of the calendar on *Factum I* is lighter than *II*; the red T at the bottom right of *I* is closer to the edge than *II*; the piece of polka-dotted fabric creases in a different area in each canvas. The minute differences can be sighted *ad nauseam*.¹⁰⁹

The main differences between the works are the elements that were left to chance; the drips that fall from the numerous brushstrokes would have been impossible to repeat perfectly between one canvas and the other. With each brushstroke, Rauschenberg mimics the similar stroke he previously made, but due to situational factors, gravity, and the thickness of the paint

¹⁰⁷ Fineberg, "Personal Selection," 86.

¹⁰⁸ Joseph, *Random Order*, 191; Rauschenberg quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, "A Conversation with Robert Rauschenberg," *Partisan Review* 35:1 (Winter 1968): 97.

¹⁰⁹ For a more in-depth description of the differences, see Joseph, *Random Order*, 191, 194-195.

on the brush, the drips remain distinct elements in spite of his attempt at repetition. Despite their simultaneous creation, the two canvases have a unique existence separate from one another. By naming the canvas the same, Rauschenberg makes it clear that they are to be examined in relation to one another, which, in turn, brings out the differences between the canvases. John Cage described the feeling he had when seeing *Factum I* and *II* together, “Everything is so much the same, one becomes acutely aware of the differences, and quickly.”¹¹⁰ By creating objects that were “identical” to one another, Rauschenberg deliberately points to the differences and purposefully calls into question the idea of reproduction. Rauschenberg, like Johns, appreciated that “with just a little examination, it’s very clear that one is not the other.”¹¹¹ In this way, the works become representations of the tenuous relationship between Rauschenberg’s creation and a reproduced object; Rauschenberg amalgamated the two in an attempt to prove that, despite the use of printed material and identical elements, the works were not an imitation of the other, just as he predicted.

Factum I and *II* appear dissimilar when viewed together, but when seen separately, the minute differences disappear; this complicates their identification as individual objects. When viewed apart, the images appear to be identical; since the details become hazy when both are not in front of the viewer, the concept of originality can no longer be attributed to either canvas because they appear to be copies. Branden W. Joseph argues that this phenomenon experienced when viewing them apart “render[s] [the works] incomplete and defeat[s] any claim to full self-presence;” this creates a situation where “neither canvas can any longer attain the solidity and self-identity that can privilege it as an original against which the other can be judged as a

¹¹⁰ John Cage, “On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work,” in *Silence* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 102.

¹¹¹ Hopps, “Interview,” 36.

copy.”¹¹² The canvases become stuck in a liminal space in which neither exists as the original or as the copy. Much like Johns’s lithograph and charcoal drawing of *0 through 9*, the similarities between Rauschenberg’s works are important and meaningful when they are exhibited together, but when they are not, they become stand-ins for each other. *Factum I* belongs to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, and *Factum II* is at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.¹¹³ Given that the pieces are typically housed in two separate museums, this tension between the objects pervades their exhibition; the works, unless brought together for an exhibit, will not be seen together in the same place, which will therefore complicate their self-identity and their relationship to each other. Caroline A. Jones argues that this phenomenon “is not even exactly a matter of *reproduction*... for we cannot say, without their Roman numerals to order them, which canvas is the ‘original’ and which the ‘copy.’”¹¹⁴ The only other instance in which the works would appear together would be in a text book or other printed form, which, as Benjamin has suggested, puts the work of art in a situation in which it is not intended.¹¹⁵ In other words, the semi-reproduced art objects remain pseudo-original in either the context where their reproductive technique is understood or in the physical mass production of their likeness. This tenuous relationship between original and copy is further emphasized when Rauschenberg turns to a printmaking technique.

Rauschenberg approaches the replicative method of silk-screening in a similar way to Johns’s use of lithograph. Instead of a simple transfer of images, Rauschenberg manipulates the silkscreen in such a way that the hand of the artist becomes evident. Although Johns’s prints addressed the original/copy issue in terms of the stone/print relationship as well as between the

¹¹² Joseph, *Random Order*, 195.

¹¹³ Ibid, 192-193.

¹¹⁴ Caroline A. Jones, “Coca-Cola Plan, or How New York Stole the Soul of Giuseppe Panza,” in *Panza: The Legacy of a Collector* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1999), 36.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 21.

different iterations of the numbers within Johns's oeuvre, Rauschenberg examines the relation between actual objects in the world and his depictions of those objects as photomechanical reproductions of those objects. In *Untitled* (1963) (Figure 3.14), Rauschenberg's screens of news photographs and mundane stock images suggest outside manipulation instead of direct transfer. On the lower right hand corner of the image, Rauschenberg screened a new photograph of John F. Kennedy during a speech in variant hues of orange and yellow. Kennedy's mouth is open, which alludes to action and events outside of the canvas. The color striations in the image from the screening process give the image a visual vibration that highlights the movement insinuated by Kennedy's position. The same photograph of Kennedy is rescreened in the upper left-hand corner of the image in blue but is cropped and turned upside down. Unlike Johns, who referenced his own work over multiple images, Rauschenberg's *Untitled* is self-referential; the image remains exceptional, however, because of the different size and color of the second Kennedy image. There are images of stacks of dishes in red on the upper right-hand side and a parachute photo cropped and screened sideways in black on the lower left. Although the image utilizes replicative methods, Rauschenberg uses paint on the canvas to fill in the areas he left unscreened, which exemplifies how different processes can come together. The area in the center of the canvas, which starts over Kennedy's head and extends to the left edge of the work, is filled in with white and black paint that mixes in places to form gray areas. A stripe of blue fills in a gap beside the large Kennedy image, a scribble of green paint sits just to the left of the blue line, and a large expanse of white forms the lower right hand corner of the piece. The mixture of silkscreen ink and painting demonstrates Rauschenberg's interest in the connection between divergent media. Much like Johns's use of lithograph, sculpture, and painting over numerous canvases, Rauschenberg manipulates multiple techniques within one work in order to draw

attention to the methods of creation. The scribbles are reminiscent of similar lines in Johns's lithographs and exude the same sense of artistic inscription on the canvas.

In *Persimmon* (1964) (Figure 3.15), Rauschenberg creates a silkscreen with art historical references. There are various objects depicted throughout the canvas, such as the persimmon alluded to in the piece's title screened on the lower portion in red and a city vista in the upper left hand corner in orangish-red. The majority of the image is a screened reproduction of John Paul Rubens's *Venus at Her Toilet* (1615) (Figure 3.16). The color palette expected from the *Venus* is not what is depicted by Rauschenberg in this work; through this manipulation, the connection with the original painting is lessened because the aesthetic elements are strikingly dissimilar. Rauschenberg uses the distracted audience and their comfort with photography in order to remediate his works' relationship to the viewer and the technique in which they are rendered. Kozloff argues that the viewer "has come to accept [photographs] as adequate substitutes for reality... if our vision is attuned to photography, even to the extent of expecting to experience painting in the medium, then, by reconstituting the photograph... Rauschenberg ironically arrives at a new work of art," which is a reality that seems to be what Benjamin feared would result from the photographic reproduction.¹¹⁶ Even though the viewer is accustomed to images reproduced through photography, Rauschenberg's manipulation of the photographic elements through silkscreen separates *Persimmon* from *Venus* and, in effect, creates a unique art object with limited connection to its art historical associations. Rauschenberg's use of a photographic reproduction of Rubens's painting is in direct confrontation with Benjamin's analysis. Benjamin critiques the use of photographic reproductions of art because it rips them from their tradition, and they are to a certain degree in *Persimmon*. Rubens's painting becomes part of Rauschenberg's work, but only as a type of found object. Much like the objects Rauschenberg

¹¹⁶ Kozloff, "Robert Rauschenberg," 214.

used in his Combines, the silkscreen of Rubens's painting is a discarded image from the historical past of art that is so far removed from the original that it could never be mistaken as the same. In this way, Rubens's work is severed from its history and becomes part of the "here and now" of Rauschenberg's piece. It then becomes part of the history of a new auratic art object with different historical connotations.

Rauschenberg utilizes images from *Untitled* and *Persimmon* in *Skyway* (1964) (Figure 3.17) in order to expose and undermine the repetition of images through the silkscreen process. *Venus* and Kennedy make two appearances, and the full image of the parachute from *Untitled* is also depicted twice. The colors of the Kennedy images refer to the screens used in *Untitled*, but the blue Kennedy is fully rendered in *Skyway*; one of the *Venus* images is also similar in color to *Persimmon*, but the deep, saturated screen work in *Persimmon* is absent from this rendition. Rauschenberg, like Johns in the brown 6 (Figure 3.1), uses a kind of erasure to assert artistic facture within the image. The area around Kennedy's hand is painted white, which makes the image look as though the surrounding screen was erased; the background of the *Venus* in the lower right corner is also painted over with the same effect. Numerous portions of the image are covered in paint like the empty portions of *Untitled*. Although the image is a finished work of art, the areas absent of subject matter imply that the work is not completed; the work is simultaneously complete and unfinished, painting and print, historical and contemporary, mass-produced and unique. Rauschenberg creates a tension between the finished and incomplete work, which illustrates a similar stress felt between the uses of media. According to art historian Jonathan Fineberg, throughout the silkscreens, Rauschenberg "reacts against the psychic distance of mass culture by appropriating its processes and artifacts into a totally reactive interaction with

immediate experience.”¹¹⁷ The meaning of the specific images does not matter; it is their relation to the broader scope of mass culture that interested Rauschenberg. The distance suggested by Kozloff between Rauschenberg’s subjects and the “originals” is a manifestation of the psychic distance between culture and its artifacts. The amalgamation of artistic facture and replicative methods calls attention to the habits and associations of the viewer. Much like he attempts to do with his combines discussed in Chapter Two, Rauschenberg, aided by society’s reliance on mass production, manipulates the complacency of the viewer and culture at large in order to force a reexamination of the art object and the role of the artist.

The self-referential nature of the silk screens and *Factum I* and *II* are reiterations of the same point but manifested in different media. The depiction of Rubens’s *Venus* over multiple silk screens or the same red T at the bottom of both canvases remain expressions of the same idea – the manipulation of similar forms with disparate techniques or compositions results in distinctive pieces. Joseph argues that “as uncanny as the differences found in *Factum I* and *II*, the silkscreens’ repetitions lack their materiality to such an extent that... [the repeated picture] appears not so much as one image repeated by another as the *same* image simultaneously visible in two different places at once.”¹¹⁸ Although Joseph makes some interesting connections between the photographic and the television image, his analysis of the two methods of self-reproduction is flawed. While the materiality of the pieces differs, the emphasis behind the duplication is the same. As discussed above, the rendition of Rubens’s *Venus* from one canvas to the other changes through Rauschenberg’s use of color and technique through the application of the silkscreen. The image, though easily decipherable as the same work, remains distinct because of how Rauschenberg treats them. Joseph notes the uncanny differences in *Factum I* and *II* but

¹¹⁷ Fineberg, “Personal Selection,” 87.

¹¹⁸ Joseph, *Random Order*, 202.

fails to notice the differences in the silkscreened images. The silkscreened photographs and paintings may be taken from the same image but are rendered in such a way that makes them impossible to be mistaken for one another. Kozloff understands that the images act as discrete elements within Rauschenberg's works; he argues that Rauschenberg "silkscreens all manner of journalistic photographs into his pictures, as if they were concrete objects, [which] subtly changes the meaning and impact of camera work in our lives."¹¹⁹ The screened images, though physically printed on the canvas, become separate objects within the piece that function within and outside of the confines of the works.

Rauschenberg's *Skyway*, *Persimmon*, and *Untitled* break down many of the distinctions made by Benjamin about reproduction and the authority of the original work of art. Each silkscreen combines elements of photography, printing, and painting. Although the numerous elements are screened on the canvas, there are also brush strokes across areas of the works. Much like Johns's merging of stenciled letters and encaustic in *White Numbers*, the combination of the screened image and the brushstroke undermine Benjamin's notion of reproduction as the loss of the aura; in these works, the merging of paint and silkscreen in divergent patterns and formations creates unique art objects that exist outside of the understood realm of the mass-produced object. Kozloff describes the silkscreens as "traces of things rather than the things themselves."¹²⁰ They are just the trace images of the objects captured on film; they depict the idea of the images, not the physical things themselves. In a way, Benjamin did allude to this eventual trend when he said that "technological reproduction can place the copy of the original in situations which the original itself cannot attain," which is true for both the original painting of Rubens's *Venus* and

¹¹⁹ Kozloff, "Critical and Historical Problems of Photography," 289.

¹²⁰ Kozloff, "Rauschenberg," 213.

the news and stock photographs Rauschenberg pulled from other sources.¹²¹ Rubens's *Venus* could possibly be in the same gallery or museum space as the silkscreens, but no one would ever allow the painting to be cut up, colorized, painted over, and placed on another canvas. In this way, Benjamin was right. The silkscreens depict the photographic image in such a way as to remove most of the connection with the original source material; Kozloff notes the "echoing series of negative, print, plate, and rephotograph almost duplicate the infinity effect of anything caught between faced mirrors, and there are at least seven (and conceivably ten) stages between Rauschenberg's image and the object out there."¹²² Rauschenberg seems to be aware of this idea of mirroring considering that the image of *Venus* we see is actually her mirror image; the Rubens image presents us with a reproduced image of Venus which, in turn, Rauschenberg replicates. This adds one more layer atop an already complicated matrix of meaning laid out by Rauschenberg within his silkscreens. Despite the use of ready-made images, the technique used to create their manifestation on canvas negates the connection to the original in all but a slightly vague recollection that the objects once were associated with some other figure or object.

Johns's images like *0-9* and *White Alphabet* are unique works of art that also present the elements necessary for artistic production. Philip Fisher discusses the ways Johns's work does this when he argues:

What Johns is interested in is the base out of which everything can be produced in representation... the mood in which Johns paints these cultural monuments [maps, letters, numbers] is a mood of melancholy and elegy, as though he is constantly aware that having the twenty-six letters you actually have nothing at all – yet. You have the materials out of which anything can be made, but at this point you have only the possibility.¹²³

¹²¹ Benjamin, *Work of Art*, 21.

¹²² Kozloff, "Rauschenberg," 213.

¹²³ Philip Fisher, "Jasper Johns: Strategies for Making and Effacing Art," *Critical Inquiry* 16:2 (Winter 1990): 350-51.

Johns presents objects, materials, words, and symbols throughout his artwork that can be used to make other works and objects; the numbers can be used to make any other number, the letters of his alphabets can make any word, and the primary colors he stencils onto works can be used to make any color. Although Fischer makes this statement, he sees this quality as the deconstruction of the work of art and the melancholy nature of his work derives from their position as “ruins” of the symbols where his paintings are “tombs” hung in a museum.¹²⁴ Fischer fails to understand that Johns’s works illustrate the endless possibilities of artistic production; they have all the elements needed for anyone to make any sort of work. Fischer also relies on Johns’s paintings alone; the analysis of Johns’s work over various media only strengthens the possibilities he sets forth. Johns creates work of the same subject matter using multiple techniques; instead of being strict copies in other media, Johns maneuvers each new work in order to make them distinctive. Through his use of various media, Johns not only shows the elements needed for artistic production, he also demonstrates the various forms they can take. He changes size, color, shape, form, technique, and materials in order to represent all the possibilities inherent in the modern age despite the introduction of mass production.

Rauschenberg takes similar steps but in a very divergent manner. Rauschenberg presents the elements needed for artistic production on a theoretical level instead of the visual level utilized by Johns. Rauschenberg creates silkscreen works like *Skyway* and *Persimmon* with a technique that can replicate any photographic image; he insinuates the option that any photographic image can be used within an artistic work in order to create an individual work of art. As discussed above, he even uses the same image across multiple pieces but in variant ways; this illustrates the ability to transform even the same image in order to make another version of a specific kind of work. Rauschenberg’s combines display a similar exposure of the elements of

¹²⁴ Fisher, “Jasper Johns,” 324, 326.

production discussed by Fisher. The found objects of Rauschenberg's combines represent the numbers and letters depicted in Johns's works; although the objects are different within each combine, the theoretical base ascribed to each element is the same. What each of the physical objects he uses does not matter; the mundane objects are what are important. Rauschenberg showcases how any object collected off the streets can be used to make a unique work of art. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the objects used in each piece bear traces of different experiences because Rauschenberg collected them from the environments he visited, which imbues each object with its own history and background. They then become part of an art object with its own unique existence. Through his multiple iterations, Johns gives the same possibility for the materials he uses and the subject matter he depicts. In the way that the letters and numbers in Johns's work stand for the possibility of reproducibility, Rauschenberg bestows the prospect of artistic value on any object off the street or found in any environment. The found objects become the idea because they were once non-art objects and then, through their use in the piece, become art objects; they become representations of the idea of possibility because they literally show how anything can become an art object.

In an age where reproduction was prevalent and the place of art was being questioned, Johns and Rauschenberg manipulate forms and techniques in order to represent the possibilities of painting, sculpture, and printing; they emphasize the use of every day materials and methods of creation in order to reassert them as valid objects and techniques for inimitable artistic production. Both artists see the possibility of their respective materials to generate, and in a sense continually regenerate, new artistic potential. Fisher and Benjamin seem to discuss the same deconstruction of painting and the art object; Fisher's references to "tombs" seem to echo with the sound of Benjamin's dying aura. Fisher argues that the exposure of the pieces of construction

signal the end of the paintings, but this interpretation of Johns's work misses the intricate matrix of meanings that the artist has woven into each of his pieces. Through the complex layers of meaning in each of their works, both Johns and Rauschenberg hope that, to use the words of John Cage, "repetition of something boring might make it interesting again."¹²⁵ Johns and Rauschenberg use techniques of mass production and self-referencing in order to undermine and simultaneously reinterpret the role of the artist and the state of the distinct art object in Benjamin's age of mechanical reproduction.

¹²⁵ Castleman, *Jasper Johns*, 20.



Figure 3.1 Jasper Johns, Color 0-9 portfolio, 1960-63, portfolio of ten lithographs from one stone, composition: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 inches (30.7 x 40.7 cm); handmade Angoumois paper sheet: 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (51.5 x 40 cm). Publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. Printer: Zigmunds Priede. Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 3.2 Jasper Johns, Grey 4, from Grey 0-9 Portfolio, 1960-63, portfolio of ten lithographs from one stone, composition: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 inches (30.7 x 40.7 cm); handmade Angoumois paper sheet: 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (51.5 x 40 cm). Publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. Printer: Zigmunds Priede. Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 3.3 Jasper Johns, Red 4, from Color 0-9 Portfolio, 1960-63, portfolio of ten lithographs from one stone, composition: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 inches (30.7 x 40.7 cm); handmade Angoumois paper sheet: 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (51.5 x 40 cm). Publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. Printer: Zigmunds Priede. Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 3.4 Jasper Johns, Grey 9, from Grey 0-9 Portfolio, 1960-63, portfolio of ten lithographs from one stone, composition: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 inches (30.7 x 40.7 cm); handmade Angoumois paper sheet: 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (51.5 x 40 cm). Publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. Printer: Zigmunds Priede. Collection of Leo Castelli.

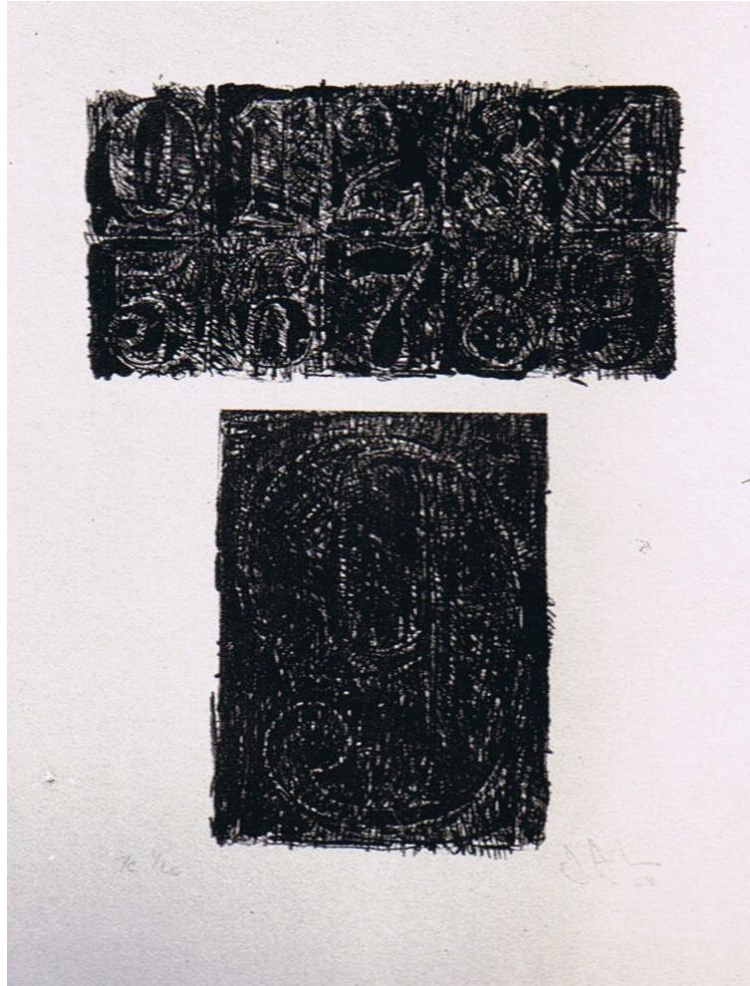


Figure 3.5 Jasper Johns, Black 9, from Black 0-9 Portfolio, 1960-63, portfolio of ten lithographs from one stone, composition: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 inches (30.7 x 40.7 cm); handmade Angoumois paper sheet: 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (51.5 x 40 cm). Publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. Printer: Zigmunds Priede. Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 3.6 Jasper Johns, Johns's Signature and Year, from Black 0-9 Portfolio, 1960-63, portfolio of ten lithographs from one stone, composition: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 inches (30.7 x 40.7 cm); handmade Angoumois paper sheet: 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (51.5 x 40 cm). Publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. Printer: Zigmunds Priede. Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 3.7 Jasper Johns, Artist Proofs for 0-9 Portfolio, 1960, portfolio of three lithographs from one stone, composition: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 inches (30.7 x 40.7 cm); handmade Angoumois paper sheet: 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (51.5 x 40 cm). Publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. Printer: Zigmunds Priede. Museum of Modern Art.

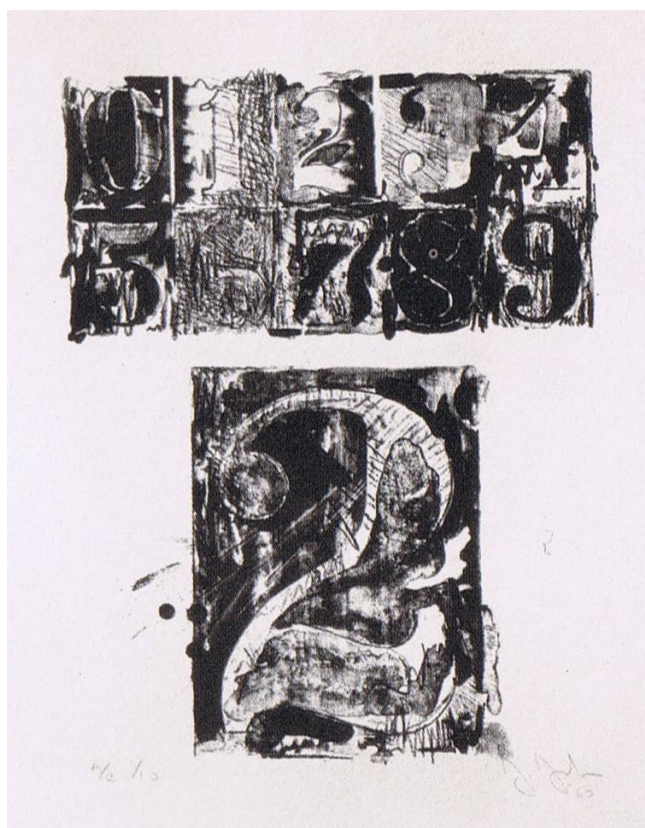


Figure 3.8 Jasper Johns, Black 2, from Black 0-9 Portfolio, 1960-63, portfolio of ten lithographs from one stone, composition: 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 inches (30.7 x 40.7 cm); handmade Angoumois paper sheet: 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 15 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (51.5 x 40 cm). Publisher: Universal Limited Art Editions, West Islip, New York. Printer: Zigmunds Priede. Museum of Modern Art.

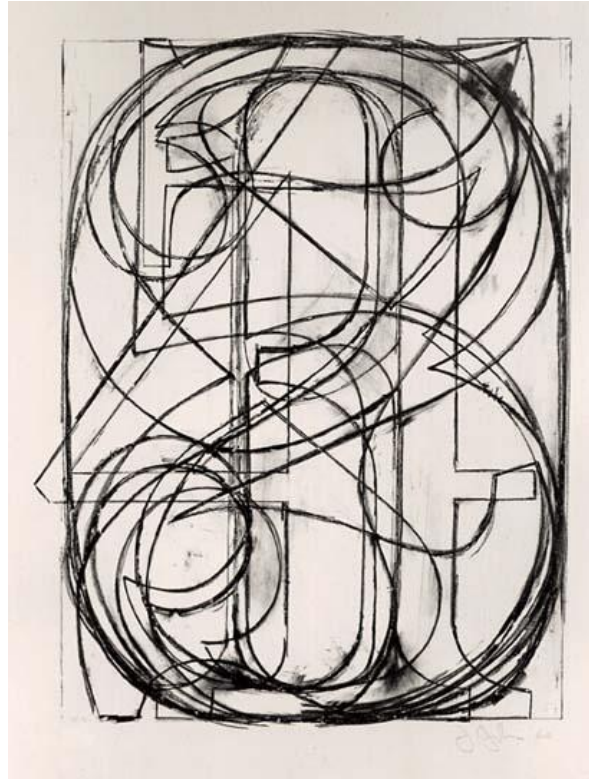


Figure 3.9 Jasper Johns, *O through 9*, 1960, charcoal on paper, 29 x 23 inches. Collection of the artist.



Figure 3.10 Jasper Johns, *O through 9*, 1961 (cast 1966), aluminum, Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 3.11 Jasper Johns, *White Numbers*, 1957, encaustic on canvas, 34 x 28 1/8 inches (86.5 x 71.3 cm), Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 3.12 Robert Rauschenberg, *Factum I*, 1957, Combine painting: oil, ink, pencil, crayon, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, and painted paper on canvas. 61 3/8 x 35 1/2 inches (155.9 x 90.2 cm). The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.



Figure 3.13 Robert Rauschenberg, *Factum II*, 1957, Combine painting: oil, ink, pencil, crayon, paper, fabric, newspaper, printed reproductions, and painted paper on canvas, 61 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 35 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (155.9 x 90.2 cm). Museum of Modern Art.



Figure 3.14 Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled*, 1964, oil and silkscreen ink on canvas, 58 x 50 inches. Collection of Janet and Robert Kardon.



Figure 3.15 Robert Rauschenberg, *Persimmon*, 1964, oil and silkscreen ink on canvas. Private Collection



Figure 3.16 Peter Paul Rubens, *Venus At Her Toilet*, 1615, oil on panel, 38.58 x 48.82 inches. Sammlung Fürst von Liechtenstein, Vaduz, Liechtenstein.



Figure 3.17 Robert Rauschenberg, *Skyway*, 1964, oil and silkscreen ink on canvas,

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